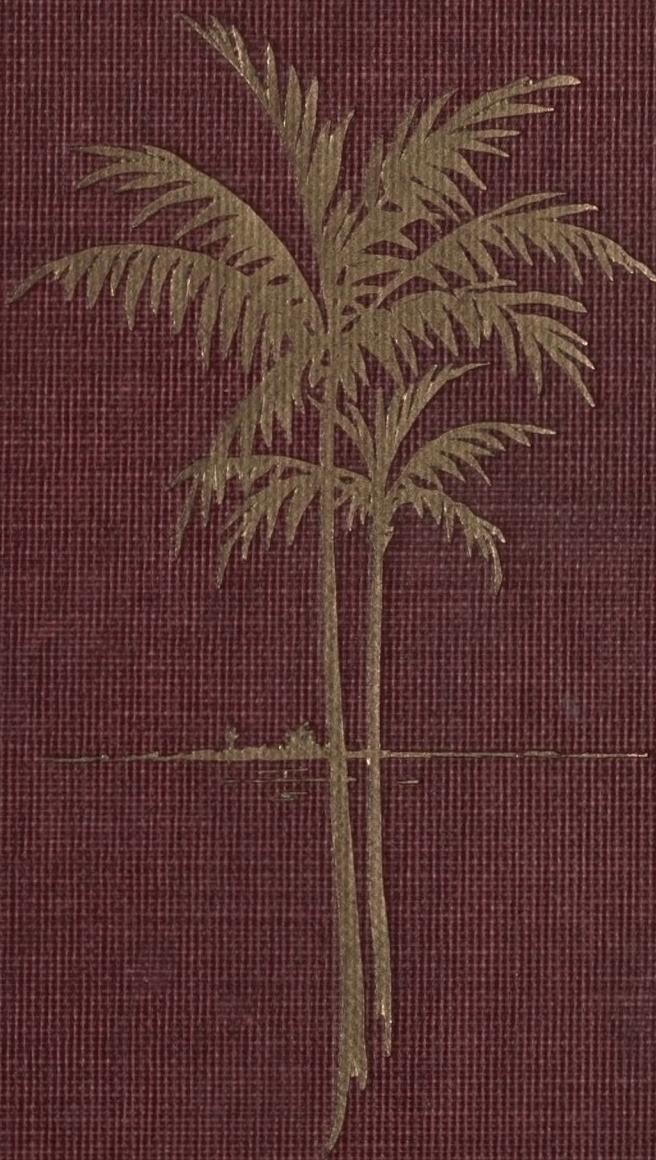


# JIM MORSE SOUTH SEA TRADER



J. ALLEN DUNN



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JIM MORSE  
SOUTH SEA TRADER







The rifle cracked, and the skipper gave a groan and slumped forward, releasing the steering-oar. *See page 206*

# JIM MORSE SOUTH SEA TRADER

*Joseph*  
BY  
J. ALLAN DUNN

ILLUSTRATED



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JIM MORSE  
SOUTH SEA TRADER



# JIM MORSE, SOUTH SEA TRADER

## CHAPTER I

### ALONE ON LELE MOTU

Jim Morse stood by the rail in the shadow of the mainsail, gazing impatiently at the plumpy palm-tops sharply defined against the horizon. For six days the schooner had been within ten miles of the atoll, near enough at times to pick out the buildings against the verdure behind the shining beach, and then the westerly current had set them back again to leeward. The schooner rolled to the ground-swell with slatting canvas, the creak of slack tackle and the constant *rat-tat* of reef points. An *escadrille* of flying fish, mailed in azure and silver, flashed up from the peacock-blue, glassy sea and volplaned desperately to escape chasing dolphins.

Jim walked aft to where the skipper stood in loin-cloth and cotton undershirt, one great, hairy hand on the idle wheel. Captain Burr had only one eye, but the single orb held a kindly spark and now it winked cheerily at the slim, sunburned lad.

"Cheer-o!" said the skipper. "It's plumb exasperatin' but you git used to it. And there's wind comin'. See them feather clouds behind the island? Wind's there, and we'll get a squall inside of an hour. Better take in the Admiral."

Jim reached up to where a brass cage, partly screened with a scrap of canvas, hung from the preventer-stay by a seizing of marlin. Its sleepy occupant, a parrot gaudy in green and gold and crimson, protested.

"*Look out!*" he screamed. "*Mind your helm, you son of a swab, you'll sink the bloomin' ship!*"

Jim laughed, as he set the cage on deck, and put his forefinger between the bars. The Admiral sidled forward threateningly with open

beak, but took the finger gently, caressing it with a leathery tongue while he shifted scaly feet in ecstasy as Jim scratched his poll.

"Took a fancy to you, has the Admiral," said Burr. "He ain't what you'd call a friendly character, as a rule."

The skipper shoved one knee between the spokes and refilled his pipe, nodding at Jim. Then, for the fortieth time, he went over Jim's appearance aboard the *Manuwai*.

"Your paw dies and you takes what's left, which ain't a heap," recapitulated Burr, observing Jim with a lively appreciation. "You makes up your mind to join your uncle. So you comes to Tahiti in a steamer, and you finds me and offers to buy passage to Lele Motu. And me, seein' as I trade with your Uncle Dan'l, I says, after sizin' of you up a bit, 'suppose you come along and work your passage,' says I, thinkin' you'd be handy and also comp'ny, me shippin' only native boys. And comp'ny you been, and handy you been. You takes to the sea like—like a fresh herrin'. More'n

that, you can cook. More'n that, you plays the mouth-organ like a—like a bloomin' siren!"

Jim flushed under his tan. He liked the praise, but it made him feel awkward.

"You've done a heap for me," he said. "Here you've lost a week trying to make the island, and you said you generally only call there on the back trip." The skipper sent a ring of smoke into the still air, watching it critically.

"Time, once you get south of Capricorn," he said, oracularly, "don't as a rule amount to a hill of beans. It's like the wash in the scuppers, comes an' goes an' you never notice it. Now what was it put it in your head to come way out here to your uncle?"

And, for the fortieth time, Jim patiently answered: "He used to write once in a while and send shells and curios. And once he came up to San Francisco to buy a sloop. He brought my mother some seed pearls, and he told me about the islands and said he thought I'd like to live there. And that I was welcome

to make a trip some time. And I used to see the ships sailing in and out of the Golden Gate, and I'd go down to the wharves pretty often. So, when father died, mother being dead too, Uncle Daniel was all I had left. I didn't want to go to work in an office, somehow. I knew Uncle Dan came up by way of Tahiti, and I remembered about you—he described you to me, you know. . . .”

“Said I was a one-eyed old pirate, I suppose,” chuckled the skipper. “Go on, son.”

“Well, I had the money and . . .”

“You had the salt in your blood, that's the long and short of it,” said Burr. “Didn't I get sick of canning 'tater bugs and skip to sea? An' . . . here comes the squall! If the surf ain't too heavy, you'll be sayin' howdy to your Uncle Dan'l before sundown. Hey, you Tomi, you Lui, you walk along mainsheet, foresheet! Jim, you tend jib an' staysail, will ye?”

Jim jumped forward, proud of his seaman-

ship, eager to reach his goal. He had been two months on the way, counting the wait for Burr's schooner to arrive and refit, not counting the six days they had wallowed in the grip of the current. Inactivity had brought disturbing doubts as to his welcome, and now action banished them as he in-hauled the headsail sheets. Then the *Manuwai* heeled to the sudden squall that bowed the distant palms and broomed the water towards them from the land. The surge hissed about the bows and spread far in the wake as the little coral isle rose from the sea, silhouetted against a sky already marshaling radiance for a tropic sunset.

The skipper brought the *Manuwai* so close that Jim saw the reef lying submerged like a pearly shadow in the blue, showing now and then the white flash of an upthrust fang as a wave rolled back. Beyond was the lagoon, translucent emerald, in sharp distinction to the deeper sea. Then the beach, silent, deserted,

the copra-shed and dwelling, all without a sign of life.

"That's queer," said Burr, as the schooner glided parallel to the coral barrier. "I don't see no whaleboat, neither. I wonder . . . ?"

He broke off and rapped out a sharp order to his crew, as he brought the schooner into the wind. They lowered and smothered the mainsail. Kalua, the Rarotonga bo'sun, took over the wheel; the three remaining natives lowered the double-ended surfboat.

"You think there's something wrong?" asked Jim, visioning disappointment with a dry throat. His uncle might have left the island. He might be sick.

"I guess not," answered Burr. "There's some sort of paper on the door of the copra-shed. Tumble into the bows there!" Jim leaped nimbly, and the skipper dropped lightly into the stern, fitting the sixteen-foot steering oar into the notch, while two *kanakas* pulled sturdily at the oars and sent the shapely boat

dancing towards the reef. Jim looked in vain for the expected opening in the line of curling breakers, plunging shoreward and toppling with a roar on the coral.

"Where's the passage?" he called out. Burr winked back at him and grinned.

"None to this reef. We jump it," he answered.

It looked perilous to Jim, but he said nothing as he clutched the gunwale on either side of him. The great seas, hissing and cresting, surged up before his eyes, racing in, bearing them on like a cork in a mill-race. The cheery natives showed their teeth in a reassuring smile. At a shout from the skipper they backed water, and the breaker lunged under and past them. Another followed, steep-sloped, up-curling.

"Now," yelled the skipper. "*Hai!*" The brown boys dug in their blades. Poised just ahead of the white mane of the wave, they tobogganed swiftly. There was a smother of

iridescent foam and spray to right and left, a bump, a scrape, and they were in the smooth lagoon.

"Gee!" cried Jim in the excitement of the moment. "Some hurdling!"

Next moment the keel grated on the crisp beach. Jim sprang out, followed by the skipper, and they walked up the white slope of wave-pounded coral to the shed where the cocoanut-meat was stored against shipment. A square of paper tacked to the padlocked door bore a brief inscription:

*Thursday, October 10.  
Gone to Tia Kau. Back  
in a week. Dan Morse.*

"Humph!" ejaculated the skipper, scratching at his beard. "Back in a week? And this is the sixteenth." He looked uncertainly at Jim.

"Then he'll be back to-morrow," said Jim. He was disappointed and yet relieved. He would have a chance to look about the place.

He would be, in a way, already established and at home when his uncle returned. "Where is Tia Kau?" he asked.

"It's a reef nigh three hundred miles from here," said Burr, cocking his eye to where the two natives were bringing up Jim's chest. "Jest a lagoon inside of a nasty reef where more'n one ship has piled up. You can't see it nights nor when the sea runs high. It'll be an atoll some day, after the coral bugs get through buildin' and a cocopalm with nuts on it floats ashore. Likely place for shell an' pearls, you see. Virgin. I've figgered some on tryin' it myself. Thet's what your Uncle Dan's after, in his big whaleboat."

Jim's prompt imagination conjured up a picture of his uncle returning with gleaming mother-of-pearl and milky pearls. They must have just missed him. He might have gone along. Then another thought came.

"You said it was dangerous?" he queried.

"Not for them that knows it," said the skip-

per. "Your uncle's no fool. The point is, what to do with you? That 'week' is kind of uncertain."

"I'll stay here, of course," said Jim. The prospect of going it alone for a day or two was alluring. "You've waited long enough. I'll be all right."

"You'll be safe enough, I reckon," said Burr. "Only . . . ? See here, Jim, your uncle might be a week overtime, two, if this weather holds, three, if the lagoon pans out. He'll have taken grub and water on chance. Suppose you come along with me? I'll be back in a month. You can leave a note for him. I'll be glad of your comp'ny. If ever any reason comes up for your not hitching with your uncle, I'd be glad to have you right along, on pay an' share. What do you say?"

But Jim's mind was made up. He was barely sixteen, but he had developed a faculty for holding to his resolutions. And the reasons were compelling ones. The prospect of

being absolutely alone on a palm island in mid-Pacific was irresistible. He had reached his goal. To go away, to be absent when his uncle came back, somehow that did not seem to be playing the game. One thing bothered him a little.

"Why shouldn't I get along with my uncle?" he asked. The skipper scratched away at his beard, apparently re-reading the notice on the door.

"Oh, no reason in partickler," he said. "It *might* happen. Your uncle is an easy man to get along with, as a rule. He has his streaks. I reckon I was speakin' mostly for myself. I'm gettin' on a bit. I like my snooze oftener than I did. An' the island-fever grips me kind of hard once in a while. I'd like another white man along to help keep an eye on things."

Jim thrilled to the flattery. He was rated as a *man*. He was conscious that he had cleaned up his share of the work aboard in ship-shape fashion, but it was good to hear it.

He was also conscious that the skipper had been a trifle evasive about the "streaks" of his Uncle Dan's nature. But he dismissed that.

"I shall stay," he said. "I'd like to be here when he gets back. There's water here, isn't there? And I've got my fishing tackle."

"A fine spring. I'll show it to ye before we go. You can live like a lord. Coco-crabs, roasted turtle eggs, turtle soup and turtle steak, green cocoanuts; there'll be taro and yams in the clearing, baked bread-fruit, wild oranges, bananas, fresh oysters, all kinds of fish. A reg'lar picnic. An' plenty stores in the house. Let's go find the key.

"You see," the skipper went on as they walked up to the house of wooden walls and corrugated iron roof, "your uncle is a sort of clearin'-house for the scatterin' atolls round about. This island of Lele Motu is the port of call. The rest of 'em bring over their copra and hawksbill turtle an' their pearl shell for him to hold in the copra-shed agin my coming.

He does all the tradin'. Thet's why his house is so big. It's part store. Thet's why he left the notice on the door, case any of 'em should happen over for trade goods. Copra ain't dried yet. But he thought they might come, or he wouldn't have left any note at all. Written in English, too. He'll have left the key somewhere handy. Ah!"

Chalked in blue on the house door were the words:

*Key in kitchen kettle.*

"None of the native boys can read, you see," said Captain Burr. "An' there ain't apt to be any tramps an' strangers about." He laughed as they went around the house to a lean-to, a grass roof supported on poles between which dried pandanus leaves were loosely braided for screens. Here was a small iron stove with a kettle on it, a table and two soapboxes that evidently served as chairs. The skipper took the key from the empty kettle and opened the

front door. There were two rooms. The smaller was furnished with native mats, a low bed, a table with a red cloth, two bona-fide chairs, some prints from illustrated papers on one wall, on the others native weapons from which hung strings of gay shells and berry-beads. The larger was the store with a counter backed by rows of shelves on which were bolts of cotton print, and brightly labeled cans. Barrels and boxes stood in the corners.

The skipper handed Jim the key.

"I don't suppose anyone'll come along, but they might. You can play storekeeper."

"How about natives?" asked Jim.

"'Tain't likely any'll bother you. You know how to handle 'em. 'Tain't as if you was in the Solomons, now. They're all friendly in the Low Archipelago. Anywhere one white man is worth a dozen of 'em."

"Just why?" asked Jim.

"Why?" asked Burr, giving the question serious thought for a moment. "Speakin' off-

hand, I'd say because a white man has imagination and uses it. He's always a jump or two ahead of a native. They think on impulse. You can bluff 'em. They never know what a white man has up his sleeve. Their minds flip about like a fish in the bottom of a boat. A white man makes up his to one thing and stays with it. *And the white man quits tryin'.* That last is the meat of it, I reckon. Well, if you stay, I'll not lose this wind. You ain't goin' to be lonely?"

"Not me," said Jim. "It's all too new." He itched to go exploring before sundown. He was going to sleep out under the palms. He was going to look for turtle eggs and get some cocoanuts and make a fire in the open. It was going to be ripping fun, as soon as the schooner left. The skipper's eye twinkled as if he understood.

"Well, Robinson Crusoe," he said, "I'll be off. I'll be back in six weeks anyway. All right, Billi-boy, we go along ship now."

## CHAPTER II

### THE MELANESIANS COME

Jim watched the whaleboat make for the reef. This time the native boys waited for an incoming roller to break. Then they sprang overboard to a footing on the reef, shoved out the boat in the back-wash and leaped aboard again. Jim saw them struggling up the blue neck of the next rearing sea monster, over the crest, with the stern out of the water for half the length of the keel, and off on the dancing waves to the schooner. But they did not make fast. Billi-boy went up the side and handed down something. Once more the boat came back, hurdling the coral and on to the beach.

"Hi, Mr. Crusoe," said the skipper. "Robinson has to have a parrot. There ain't any on Lele Motu. I'm loanin' ye the Admiral."

He thrust the cage into Jim's hands. Back went the whaleboat to be tackled smartly to the falls and hoisted inboard as the schooner paid off, and the *Manuwai* went bowling off before the breeze, her mainsail swinging up to the sturdy pull of her crew. The Admiral shrieked a farewell.

"*Tend your helm! Look out! Look out!*  
*You'll sink the bloomin' ship!*"

"Good old Admiral!" said Jim as he watched the speedy schooner drive before the wind. "Good old skipper! He thought I'd be lonely. I'll bet he'll be more so."

He realized the sacrifice Captain Burr had made. The Admiral, before Jim had gone aboard, was the skipper's only company.

"Come on, Admiral, I'll hunt you up a banana and then I'll rustle grub. Gee, but this is some picnic!"

As Jim hunted for ripe bananas he remembered the skipper's translation of the name of the island. *Lele Motu*. *Lele* meant little and

*motu* boat or island. The fanciful double meaning seemed apt. He was skipper of a little boat, moored for the time in mid-Pacific, with an Admiral for first mate and he, for the time at least, was in supreme command. He could be pirate captain or cannibal chief as he willed. He gave the bird its fruit, and started preparing his own meal, for the sun was close to the horizon and the palms were lacing the beach with long shadows.

Jim woke at dawn. The sky was a marvel of hyacinth and tender green, flecked with tiny clouds of deep violet and brightest orange. Swiftly it brightened, dazzling, then faded to turquoise that deepened to a velvety blue. Jim started off for a swim in the lagoon. With its unbroken reef he thought it should be safe from marauding sharks. The Admiral's cage was empty. No fastening could long hold the Admiral when he made up his mind for adventure, but his wings were clipped and Jim had no fear of losing him. He could see the bird's trail

distinct in the fine sand, leading towards a coco-palm that angled seaward in a graceful curve. Jim had climbed it for nuts the night before, and now the Admiral, blazing in the level sun rays like a living jewel, was walking up the slender stem sedately.

The reef breakers, that had crooned all night, now seemed to fall with fresh vigor, pounding on the coral in broken pyramids of jade and ivory. Jim looked towards them, shading his eyes against the sundazzle.

Something appeared on a seething crest, a slender length of black like a mammoth water beetle, striking out with desperate legs. The next instant it slid sideways down the watery hill and smashed upon the reef. A dozen figures fell from it, and then a dozen bobbing heads appeared in the lagoon. It was a canoe, the bobbing heads were those of natives.

While he stared, first one, then another, dragged a weary body up on the beach and rested on hands and knees with heads hanging

down as if exhausted. Slowly they got to their feet and staggered up the beach.

They were like no natives Jim had yet seen. These men were black rather than brown. Their hair stood up in fanlike frizzes, dyed yellow by lime. Their foreheads were low, eyes deep sunken, chins retreating. The distended lobes of their ears hung in ragged strips almost to their shoulders and, stuck in the leathery fringes, were ornaments of brass and shell. Save for a wisp of fibre they were stark naked. And they were almost skeletons. Hips and ribs showed through skin tight as the parchment on a drum, elbows and knees were great knots, and the legs and arms mere bone and corded sinews. Their lips were hideously swollen and cracked, they leaned on long spears. One, who appeared the leader, with a shell ring thrust through the cartilage of his nose, carried a club inset with gleaming bits of shell and studded with sharks' teeth. In the lagoon, its outrigger smashed, drifted their

canoe, a high-prowed, elaborately carved model.

Jim knew instinctively that these were not natives of the Lower Archipelago. These were savages, fighting men, cannibals perhaps, wind-blown off their course, carried he guessed not how many leagues on the equatorial currents. And they were spent to the limit of weakness. He stood his ground, while they stared back with bloodshot eyeballs, as the leader with the club advanced and, pointing to his distorted mouth, croaked out one syllable, "*Vai!*" (water).

Ten minutes later they were ravenously bolting the remnants of the meal that Jim improvised. As they finished, some of them rolled face down on the coral grit and lay like stuffed manikins. The leader scooped out the last of a can of salmon with his fingers, swallowed the remaining oil and got up, stalking towards Jim. He achieved another word, part of the Beach-English common to the South Pacific.

“*Wisiki?*”

Jim shook his head. There was some whisky in the store-room, but he was not going to dole it out to savages. The chief looked at him suspiciously, his eyes roved about the atoll beach, noting, Jim felt, the absence of a whaleboat, the lack of other whites or natives.

“*Kini-kini?*”

Jim shook his head again. He had noticed several cases of square-faced trading-gin, but he considered hospitality had reached its limit. The face of the chief suddenly turned to that of a thwarted devil.

“*Kini-kini!*” he demanded. His followers were up, standing back of him. It was not a pleasant sight, the leering eyeballs, the spears leaning forward with their shafts upon the sand and their metal heads gleaming. Jim thought of all the tales that he had heard of savage cruelty. To give them liquor would be but the beginning of looting. After that they would probably destroy him as a witness

against punishment. His jaw set and his gray eyes looked back into the greedy orbs of the savage with a steadfast gleam.

"*Aole!*" he said firmly. It was the Polynesian word for "no," and the Melanesians recognized it. The chief curled back his lips and made a sudden, suggestive grimace before which Jim paled and stepped back, only promptly to recover his stand. Plainer than any language the horrid, snapping motion of the filed teeth had said, "Give, or I will tear the flesh from your bones with my teeth."

For the second Jim felt unutterably lonely and defenseless. He had no weapon. Suddenly, the words of Captain Burr came back to him, "One white man is worth a dozen of 'em. You can bluff 'em. They never know what a white man has up his sleeve. *A white man quits tryin'!*"

"Bluff them. How?"

"*Kini-kini! Wisiki!*" They commenced to crowd him, gesticulating and pointing to-

wards the house. But they had not rushed him. They were still afraid of what he might have up his sleeve.

Jim held up his hand, looking hard at the chief who gazed in a momentary fascination. Then Jim made a deep cross in the sand with a shell that lay at his feet. He scored a heavy line some thirty feet in front of them, marking the end with another cross. He was a bit proud of that line. It was unwavering.

"Now," he said in English, pantomiming in illustration. "One of you step over that line and see what will happen." He put all the conviction he could into the words and stepped back and to one side with folded arms under which he felt his heart pumping. Would it work? Could he bluff them for a while? Perhaps . . .

The chief looked at him hesitatingly, the rest watching him. This was some white man's magic. For a moment it was very quiet, the savages blinking, the chief grinning un-

certainly. But he made no movement forward. And Jim completed his bluff. He deliberately turned his back on them and walked to the house, expecting every second to hear the *whish* of a spear and feel its impact in his back. It was the hardest thing he had ever done in his life. At the shack he tasted blood where he had bitten through his lower lip to keep it steady. When he turned around they were still back of the line.

There was a knife in the house, on the table, and Jim reached in and got it. But he would be as a baby in their grips. And it could not last. If he really had the upper hand, he would have ordered them from the atoll. Soon, they would realize this, realize he was only a boy and alone.

He saw the change coming. The natives muttered. One of them shoved the other, half fearfully, and the man stepped over the magic line. And nothing happened.

With a "yah!" of derision and disgust they

surged forward. Spears streaked towards Jim, and two stuck quivering in the jamb of the door, a handsbreadth away. The chief came on in long hopping bounds, his club above his head. Then, from the sky, it seemed, came a shrill voice.

*"Look out. Look out below! You'll sink the bloomin' ship!"*

They had transgressed! The white magic was commencing! These were white men's words, though they knew not the meaning. But they sensed them as a menace, a warning! Some spell of death! From where? There was no one in the trees!

They halted almost in mid-stride, suddenly frozen like quail before the oncoming dog.

*"Mind your helm, you sons of swabs! Belay and hard-a-lee!"*

Hidden in the green fronds, one eye cocked to the natives below, the Admiral issued his orders. Then he emerged, sidling down the trunk, scolding shrilly, crest raised. The sav-

ages shuddered. Parrots they knew, parrots that screamed. But this one talked aloud! It was an *atua* (god) that had assumed this shape. Their weapons fell to their sides. Their knees knocked, awaiting the fatal stroke that must surely fall. The Admiral advanced from the tree across the sand, looking at the natives as if he was reviewing them. Natives he knew and hated and despised. He advanced sideways towards the chief who stood goggle-eyed and motionless. On went the Admiral, looking up warily, heedless of Jim's call. He planted his claws between the chief's feet and dug fiercely at the ankle nearest to him.

With a yell the wounded savage leaped high, bringing down his club instinctively. As it fell it caught the Admiral in his backward jump. It struck his outspread wing and sent him sprawling on the beach in a whirl of sand and thrashing feathers.

The spell was broken! The god was only a bird. With a yell the natives rushed for Jim.



They surged forward. Spears streaked toward Jim, and two stuck quivering in the jamb of the door



There were lumps of coral by the steps of the house. Swiftly Jim stopped and clutched and flung a rough missile fairly into the face of the leading savage. It caught him between the eyes at short range with all the "speed" Jim could put behind it. The man dropped.

Another leaped over him and grabbed Jim's left arm. The boy slashed out with his knife and saw the red blood start. Panting, he wrenched free. The thing that saved him from their spears was the fact that they attacked in a huddle. Then they separated at a hoarse shout and Jim, desperately gripping his weapon, saw the towering form of the chief leap forward, the great club lifted. . . .

"*Thup!*" Jim caught the sound distinctly, as if some one had struck a carpet with a stick. A red spot appeared on the chest of the chief, grew into rapidly expanding flower and the savage suddenly slumped like a sack partly filled with sawdust. The other natives wheeled about, uttering cries of submission

and flinging down their spears. A whaleboat was on the edge of sand and water, a boat twice the size of that carried on the *Manuwai* and equipped with a mast. A white man, red bearded, stood by the bows, a rifle carried in his hands, ready for the aim. At his order eight brown-skinned Polynesians, four of whom also carried guns, were coming up the beach towards Jim and the surrendering savages. Jim dropped his knife and sprinted to the boat.

"Uncle Dan!" he cried as he ran. "Uncle Dan, it's Jim!"

"So I see," said the ruddy-whiskered trader laconically. "It's a bit of a surprise party all around. Come on up to the house and tell me your end of it first. My throat's like a lime kiln; we've had bad luck, and been shy of water since yesterday. Hello, what's this?"

"This," was the Admiral, with feathers and feelings still ruffled, but very much alive, waddling towards Jim. Jim picked up the parrot

, which perched on one hand, while Jim caressed him with the other.

"*Look out,*" said the bird, addressing Daniel Morse. "*Look out, you son of a swab, you'll sink the bloomin' ship!*"

"It's Captain Burr's parrot," said Jim. "He saved my life."

"I know the brute," said his uncle. "He tried to lunch off my finger when I was asleep on deck one time. I'm glad to hear he can be useful. As for saving your life, you seemed to be taking a pretty good hand in that yourself, far as I could see. We spotted the muss as we made the reef, and I got busy. You held 'em off just long enough. I'm proud of ye."

"Thanks, Uncle Dan," answered Jim. "I thought it was all over. I was too excited to see your boat come over the reef but I figured that—that if I had to quit, I might as well *quit trying.*"

## CHAPTER III

### THE PEARLS OF TIA RAU

It was the end of Jim's fourth week on Lele Motu. Captain Burr had said he would be back in a month.

Jim wiped the smarting sweat out of his eyes and straightened his back with a sigh of relief as he tallied the last of the sacks of copra. The native boys were already splashing and laughing in the lagoon, glad to get out of the tin-roofed copra shed with its super-heated air, heavy with the smell of slightly rancid cocoanut meat. Outside, glowing like a jewel in the sun, the Admiral stalked over the sand towards a slanting palm, cocking one ruby-circled eye at Jim as the latter came to the door and clucked with his tongue at the gorgeous bird. The sand scorched Jim's bare soles, and

he hurried down to the water that was almost as green inside the reef as were the feathers on the parrot's back.

The surface water in the lagoon was warm, but Jim, imitating the natives, over whom he had charge in working hours, swam down to cooler depths and clung to projections in the pitted wall of the coral reef and, half-hidden in the trailing banners of weed, watched the scurrying schools of gaudy fish for all of two bursting minutes before he shot up to the surface.

Ratiki, who was a Penrhyn man, a shark-killer, a swimmer who swam as another man walks, a famous pearl-diver and, with all these attributes, a lazy, thieving rascal, could stay down for twice that time, while, with a hand-net and a palm-leaf, he fanned into the meshes a dozen gaudy colored, strange-shaped rockfish. Ratiki controlled his limbs as if they were fins, guiding himself without apparent effort. Daniel Morse declared that, if Ratiki was dissected, he would be found equipped with an air blad-

der, like a fish, so that he could rise or descend at will.

Ratiki, playing shark, grabbed Tomi, the sleek, porpoise-bodied boss of the copra-drying, by the leg to drag him into an underwater cave. The two made themselves the hub of a prodigious whirl of bubbles and, just as Jim, breathless, rose, Tomi kicked Ratiki in the stomach and drove him gasping to the top.

"My word," he spluttered. "Bimeby I plenty fix that Tomi! Too much pain he make walk along my belly. I think, Misti Jimi, unless I get *kini-kini* (gin) plenty quick I *mäté* (die)."

And then Ratiki forgot his stomach-ache and all the natives clubbed their way overhanded to shore with the Polynesian crawl, as the Admiral, wide awake now, screamed:

*"There she blows, my hearties! There she blows! All hands aloft, you lubbers, or you'll sink the bloomin' ship!"*

Jim saw his napping uncle slide out of the hammock on the store veranda and focus a pair

of sea-glasses on a schooner that came blithely on before the breeze, dropped mainsail, came up smartly into the wind and let its anchor go in twenty fathoms.

A dinghy shot out from the lee side of the visitor, bearing a kedge anchor that was deftly thrown to the shore side of the reef where its flukes caught and held, so that the schooner rode between two cables, safe from any chance of grinding on the coral. The dinghy returned and, presently, a whaleboat with a white man in the stern and four lusty *kanakas* at the sweeps, came racing to the reef line, stayed, backing water till the white man tossed up his hand, standing to handle the long steering oar, hung in the crest of a curving wall of hissing jade and silver, then leaped the barrier and swiftly made the beach, where all *Lele Motu* was drawn up in welcome.

Daniel Morse, on *Lele Motu*, as port-of-call for a dozen atolls, acted as middleman for other owners by virtue of the fact that Old Man Burr, of the schooner *Manuwai*, was a

friend of his and had, somewhat arbitrarily, established *Lele Motu* as the clearing-house of the little archipelago. And here were skipper and schooner ready for the cargo over which Jim had so earnestly labored. It was a welcome sight to Jim, for Captain Burr's friendly warning about his uncle had already been backed by material reasons. Daniel Morse had an uncertain temper, streaky as his spurts of work and long hours of idleness, and, more than once, Jim smelled the reek of gin wafted on his uncle's snores.

Sometimes, though he banished the thought as disloyal, Jim wished that the genial skipper had been his relative.

Daniel Morse shooed off the natives as if they had been flies, and, hooking the skipper under the elbow, bore him off to the store. Jim followed with the Admiral atop his shoulder. But he did not go in immediately, for he thought he caught sight of Ratiki sneaking through the pandanus growth and, wondering what the rascal was up to, tried to trail him,

but lost him in the thick scrub back of the store and living cabin.

"If I'd had a decked boat," Daniel Morse was saying when Jim entered, "I'd have stuck it out, dirty weather or not; but Tia Rau is no place to get caught in a whaleboat. Too many sharks about, for one thing. The rips are alive with 'em. We were shy of water an' the sun spiled the nuts for drinkin', so, what with the weather thickenin' up an' the sea gettin' nasty, as soon as Ratiki comes up from his third dive, I makes up my mind to come home. It ain't a one-man job, an' that's a fact, when that man don't own sloop or schooner, an' I'm offering you clean halves, if you'll go over with me. As for what we'll get—look at these—out of three dives, mind ye."

He took a tin box from his pocket and turned it open and upside down on the counter. Something rattled out, something rolled tinkling up against the bottle of square-face that Daniel Morse had set out for his guest and himself. Jim craned forward. He saw some

curiously shaped pieces of pearl, perhaps a dozen white specks, two pearls the size of B.B. shot and one as big as a fat green pea, milky, opalescent, fuzzy with faint fire. Captain Burr poked at the others with a horny middle finger, but picked up the gem with a raising of his grizzled, overhanging eyebrows.

"Them atoll reefs without any land but the top of the coral are the places where the big pearls grow," he said. "And shell was up and still risin' when I left Tahiti. Looks good, Morse. I'll go you."

"Good! When? I don't like to leave the thing any longer. It's been there a long time, I know, but now I've found the stuff, I'm nervous. Black and Gooch, over there on Nivau, have got a sloop. If they got wind of this, they'd be there like a duck. 'Findings-keepings' in this game, you know, skipper. 'Tain't as if you could stick up a shack on Tia Rau and claim possession. Even at low tide there ain't nothin' but a few shag-rocks."

"I've seen the place," said the captain.

"And," he added with a grin, "it ain't the first bunch of pearl I've got by beatin' the other fellow to it. But who's likely to tip off Dave Black and Pete Gooch?"

Morse lowered his voice.

"Ratiki," he said. "He came over to me after he'd had a run-in with Dave Black a year ago. He's a good diver and boat-boy, but a bad egg. I've had to dock him 'count of the stuff he swipes, an' I had a run-in with him last week. He'd blow off to Black in a minute, if he thought he'd get even with me an' something for himself. He's no fool, an' he'll figger that you an' me may make a deal. He knows why I had to give it up with only my whaleboat." The skipper looked shrewdly at Morse.

"What did you do? Beat him up?" he asked. Morse's tan deepened.

"I lammed him some with a stingray whip," he said. "He'd got into the store an' swiped a bottle of *kini-kini* and some salmon."

"Too bad you licked him, Morse," he said.

"A Penrhyn man don't forget that or forgive it in a hurry. Better keep an eye on Ratiki. I don't see as I can go with ye until I get back from Tahiti. What you've got will fill me up. I can come back right off."

"Wish you'd change your mind and go right now," said Daniel Morse. "I've got a hunch we'll lose out if we pass up the chance. Grab the luck when you find it, 's my motto."

"I thought I saw Ratiki sneaking 'round back of here before I came in," broke in Jim.

"You did? Then go get him. The rascal understands United States pretty well. There's only my whaleboat on the island, outside of your boats. No canoes. I won't let 'em have 'em. Only way to keep 'em here. Wages won't hold 'em. *You* know that. But I'll keep Mister Ratiki under my eye."

"'Bout twenty mile to Nivau, ain't it?" asked the skipper.

"We call it that. Why?"

"Better round up Ratiki right away. Sun's gettin' low. Come nightfall, he may take it in

his head to swim over to Nivau an' tip off Black."

"Swim twenty miles?" asked Jim. "What about sharks?"

"I don't know," said Burr. "Maybe they don't like Penrhyn islanders, maybe they all pack a charm, like they say they do. I do know that I've met 'em miles from shore, fishin', shovin' a small plank that holds their lines an' bait an' catch. They'll swim off five miles with a letter for a trade dollar any day. Better round up Ratiki."

Jim dived through the back door as his uncle called Tomi to help find the boy. Lele Motu was not more than a mile in length, and about three-quarters at its greatest breadth, but it was thick with scrub back from the beach and trails were few. Already the sky was greening to sunset, with tiny flecks and streamers of cloud, high up, changing from orange to pink. As he came back unsuccessful from the windward point, the pink clouds turned to purple, the sky faded like the side of a landed dol-

phin, the sun dipped and, with a rush, the stars were out, turning from glittering silver to throbbing gold as the sky grew olive, violet, purple-black, and Jim hit the open beach to avoid tripping up in the bush vines and jungle tangle.

There was no moon, but the deep dusk was transparent. It was like looking through stained glass, he thought, as he hurried on. Out of a clump of ironwood, Jim fancied he saw a dark figure glide to the lagoon and he hurried on, shouting. There was some one swimming under water, leaving a dim trail of greenish sea-fire. Where the combers fell on the reef, they showed the reflection of their foaming crest in a pale glow. Jim saw something like a seal's head rise in this phosphorescence and then a body scuttle across the coral and dive horizontally into the heart of a roller. A call brought Captain Burr and Morse.

"It's Ratiki," exclaimed Morse. "I wish I had a rifle. I'd throw a scare into him, if nothing worse."

"See him, Jim? Dived like a loon," said the skipper, coming up. "You'll not see him again in this light, Morse. Time we got a boat after him he'd be a mile away. Come on back. He's gone to tip off Black and Gooch. We'll get out soon as the tide changes. No use bucking the current."

Soon Jim was busy in the hurried preparation to start for Tia Rau, the lonely reef that just protruded above high water, where lay an untouched bed of pearl-shell in the shallow, shark-guarded lagoon.

"I've seen that sloop of Black's," said the skipper. "Saw it over to Tahiti, before they bought it. Built in San Francisco. Spoon-bowed, fast as a streak, sticks its nose into the wind and eats it. Go four fathom to my three, close-hauled, and that's how we'll be sailing. But they've got to wait on tide, same as we have, or chance gettin' set 'way down to leeward."

Daniel Morse was busy getting cartridges for two Winchesters and a brace of automatics,

and the skipper nodded at Jim to drive home his talk.

"Will it give Ratiki time to get over to Nivau?" asked Jim.

"It's this way," answered the skipper, arranging some objects on the table in the store counter. "Ratiki's got a five-knot current to help him along and he'll make the most of it without tirin' himself. We can't count on gettin' any the better of the start. Here's the way we lie. This cartridge is Tia Rau, the baccy-tin Lele Motu and this glass Nivau . . ."

Jim noted the points forming an obtuse-angled triangle with the twenty miles between Lele Motu and Nivau as the base, the apex swung to the east, in the direction of Lele Motu.

"They've got the longer leg," he said.

"But the faster boat, 'less the wind changes. It's goin' to be touch an' go. Reckon we'll both hit there about dark. Got to, if we figger on anchorin'. Then the fun'll start. If it's too late, it'll hold over till next mornin'."

You see, Jim, like your uncle says, if we had any shack there, or any sort of location notice, we'd have first claim, an' it's likely Black an' Gooch wouldn't dispute it. But there's nothin' to prove we got there first an', if the pearls show like they should from what Ratiki brought up from the patch he struck, there's a small fortune there, an' one worth fightin' over."

"With those?" asked Jim, glancing at the guns.

"Surest thing ye know. Ain't afeared, are ye? Mebbe you'd better stay to home."

"Not me," protested Jim. "I'm no good at shooting; at least, I don't know much about it, but I can do my trick on the schooner. You know that, Captain Burr?"

"Sure I do. I reckon you'd better come, if you're to get your share of what we find."

"How's that?" asked Daniel Morse sharply. "What share? What 'ud the boy do with a share? I'm lookin' out for him all right."

"Well," said the skipper. "He might eddi-cate himself with it or maybe buy a share in a

good, lively schooner." He winked at Jim. "But we'll argy that later. Time to be gettin' aboard. Talk ain't oysters and all oysters ain't pearlfish. Come on."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RACE FOR TIA RAU

The skipper took the wheel and Jim stood in the bows as the schooner swashed through the luminous seas. The brine seethed away in streaks of green fire, yet the drops, tossed aloft to the deck as the head-wind flung up the spray, were pale violet, the hue of burning alcohol. His brain was busy. "A share in a good, lively schooner!" The skipper had meant the *Manuwai*. He liked Jim and had wanted him to go along with him, before they reached Lele Motu. That would be fine! To trade among the islands and see the native customs; to collect curios on the side while they swapped prints and tobacco and salmon for *beche-de-mer*; for trepang, the sea-slugs the Chinese bought so eagerly, for copra and turtle-shell. Great! But they might have to fight for it.

The sloop from Nivau was slashing through the waves on a converging tack, towards them. What would happen when they met at the apex? Jim remembered the saying of a pearl-buyer at Tahiti, while he had waited for the schooner to clear. "The whiter the pearl, the more blood back of it." Inside of twenty hours they might be all trying to murder one another before the oysters were disturbed at all. And if Ratiki came?—but Jim figured from what he knew of the Penrhyn man that the latter would not risk the wrath of Daniel Morse, but would stay behind to enjoy the gifts given him for his news.

The motion of the vessel made Jim sleepy, and he curled up on a coil of the anchor cable of fine Manila hemp, heedless of the lunges of the schooner, the shock from the seas, the slat of the jibs above him, and the heavy *boom-boom* when the water pounded on the curve of the bows. His uncle woke him at dawn to offer him a breakfast of a cup of hot tea and some biscuit.

"The skipper says you can steer," said Morse.  
"Take your trick."

Jim jumped at the chance. The wind was still heading, and, with flattened canvas, the schooner clawed into it. Jim strove to hold her on one spoke, listening for the tell-tale flutter in the sails that would warn of holding up too close, watching the little flag at the peak to see that he did not fall off. The skipper came over to him and gave him a slap on the shoulder.

"That's the way, Jim. Humor her a bit on the big ones. Keep her from swingin'. You're doin' fine."

His trick over, Jim stayed at the port rail, watching for some sign of the sloop. But the blue seas ran glassy clear to the horizon; not even a gull was in sight. A dolphin chased some flying-fish for a while and then, having sated both sport and stomach, left them alone. Jim wandered aft to where the skipper leaned against the taffrail, smoking a short pipe. Daniel Morse was below, asleep.

"I was thinking," said Jim, "remembering the way you showed the lay-out last night, that if we are to keep close-hauled an' the wind holds, the sloop from Nivau 'll be reaching, won't she?"

The skipper let a trailer of smoke from his mouth.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Reachin' an' goin' like a cat up a tree. But we're doin' fine. Keep her up well, Billi-Boy. Doin' fine. I don't believe there's goin' to be fifteen minnits difference between us. You can try the patent log, if ye want to, though they's small sense to me in knowin' how fast you're goin', so long's you're goin' as fast as you can, and you ain't got to worry about your reckoning."

Jim cast the brass log with its turning screws. It registered a little better than nine knots. At four bells in the afternoon he took the wheel again. The breeze was still strong and steady. At eight bells, Billi-Boy, the *kanaka* boatswain, relieved him and, with a grin, pointed out a speck far to port.

"By golly, that sloop she walk along plenty quick!" said Billi-Boy.

Jim watched the white fleck of sail grow until the flash of the hull came intermittently, as the sloop rapidly closed in towards them. His uncle and the skipper were forward, the latter with his powerful binoculars trained ahead. He passed them to Morse.

"That's our place, I take it," he said. "I've always given it a clear berth when I was this way. A nasty hole."

"And the weather ain't lookin' over and above good," said Daniel Morse. "That's the spot, right enough."

With the waning of the afternoon the weather had slowly changed. Off to windward, heavy squalls of rain showed and the sea had turned gray. Jim strained his eyes and saw a circle of livid green fringed with white foam and here and there a black fang showing in the creamy wash. It was Tia Rau, a half developed atoll, all reef, the central core still below the surface. His uncle passed him

the glasses in turn, bidding him look at an object that showed among the rocks.

"That's someone's anchor. All that's left of them," he said. "I counted seven of them stuck in the reef. Seven anchors and seven wrecks, with the crews gone to feed the sharks. Look at the hungry devils, now. They think we're goin' to give 'em another meal."

Gliding through the gray water were the sickle fins of several sharks, seemingly curious at the approach of the vessel. One swam high enough to show both the dorsal and the upper lobe of his tail.

Aboard the sloop a little group was forward, a white man among them, clad in ducks and singlet, his hair a flame of red in the quickening sunset. Another white man, with only a waist cloth about his loins, his skin almost as dark as a native's, a long black beard streaming across his chest, was at the wheel, glancing at the schooner as the two boats neared each other and the reef. Not a hail was given. Already the nearness of the pearls and the close finish

of the race seemed to have bred a sullen hostility.

"Jim, take the wheel," said the skipper. "Ready, Billi-Boy. Stand by fore and main sheets! Ready on the downhauls for'ard! Chuck her into the wind, Jim! Over with her!"

On board the sloop the same manœuvres were being gone through, but the sloop's sheets were farther out and she was off the wind. Jim could hear the shouts of both the white men coming down wind plainly. The anchors hit the water at almost the same second. Down came the sloop's mainsail, then her jib, and the two craft rode within a cable's length while their crews furled sail. Captain Burr put out a second anchor aft and they repeated the move aboard the sloop.

"Dead heat," muttered Daniel Morse.  
"What's the next move?"

"Can't get a boat inside that reef for an hour yet," pronounced the skipper. "Then it'll be dark. Hail 'em and ask 'em to come aboard,

Morse. They'll come. Just as anxious to keep eyes on us as we on them. We can talk the thing over."

Daniel Morse cupped his hands and roared the invitation. Somewhat to Jim's surprise, it was accepted. A small boat danced over the uneasy waves towards the schooner. Two *kanakas* pulled and the white men were in the stern. Jim noticed his uncle belting on his automatic. The skipper had shoved his in his hip pocket, where it bulged conspicuously.

The greeting between the four was outwardly friendly, but the boat was not sent away, though the native boys climbed aboard and fraternized with the schooner's crew.

"Come below an' let's talk this thing over," suggested Daniel Morse. "We'll have chow, too. Jim," he added, "you get a bite in the galley. Better keep out of this."

The universal meal of canned beef, tea and captain's biscuits was served. Voices came up the open hatch.

"You can't prove you were here first, Morse,

and you know it. What's the use of talking?" The voice was high pitched and querulous. Jim fancied it belonged to the red-headed man.

"No use talkin' till to-morrow, anyway." That was the bearded one, Gooch, thought Jim. His deeper voice was deprecating. "Let's be sociable. Here's grog, an' I dessay Morse or the skipper here has got some cards. We can have a game an' keep each other company. Can't start anything to-night."

Then came the chink of glasses, the smell of burning tobacco. Jim felt relieved. The men were not quarrelsome. Still, they had brought their guns with them. The skipper came up on deck. Jim went to him.

"Ah, Jim," he said. "I reckon they'll make a night of it. Don't you worry none. We'll keep the peace till morning. They're mainly bluff, but they got their hook down as soon as we did an', as it stands, they've got an even look in. They could claim shares an' get it."

"But uncle's men would prove he was here before? You saw the pearls."

"*Kanakas'* word ain't worth a pinch of wet salt before the Commissioner. It's two white men against two. Ratiki would swear he didn't get the pearls, anyway. And the Crown 'ud claim a big share. Might claim to own the reef. No tellin', where there's pearls in sight, an' no location notice. Some one 'ud cook up a claim."

"What's a location notice?" asked Jim.

"Some sort of scribble on a shack or a tree to show the lagoon is being worked by someone. Don't know as it's altogether legal, but it 'ud bluff off those two. Give us a big advantage, if we had to put the matter up to the Commish. Besides, they're yellow at bottom. Don't believe they'd start a scrap, but, if they think they got equal rights, they'll stick, an' then your uncle's likely to start something by mornin'. I'll keep the peace till then. You better turn in whenever you feel like it."

Jim did not feel like it. A plan was slowly hatching in his mind. The lagoon lay quiet. A small boat could enter now. But, patrolling

the little gate, criss-crossing the fiery trails from their fins, moved the sharks. And, on the reef, several anchor stocks, the only monuments of the crews that had found their fate in the maws of the sea-tigers, showed plainly.

Jim shivered a little and then screwed up his courage to his undertaking. "You've only got to be careful, Jim," he said, half aloud, to hearten himself. "That's all. It's worth trying. By morning they'll be in ugly temper and there may be murder. You might get rid of a terrible row if you take the chance. Buck up and play the game!"

Forward, the natives were chanting their island *meles* (songs), sprawled out on deck. Soon they would be asleep. A riding light shone from the sloop. Otherwise it was dark. The small boat that had brought over Black and Gooch trailed from the mainsheet cleat, its oars stuck under the thwarts. Jim knew the lay-out of the schooner. He went below, down the fore-companion, passed into the trade-room and lit a swinging lamp. Through

the doored partition to the main cabin he could hear the laughs and ejaculations of the four pearl hunters as they played cards in seeming amiability.

Jim found a marking-pot and the lid of a case of tobacco that was only lightly held on by two or three nails. Then he set to work. Half an hour later he came on deck again. The native boys were quiet now, asleep on the planks. Jim climbed over the rail, got into the small boat and threw off the hitch, coiling the painter. The sea pitched only moderately. Though the sky was murky, there seemed no likelihood of anything but passing squalls.

Suddenly, the boat lurched as if it had struck a rock. Jim looked to see a whirl of aqueous flame glide off. Another was approaching. Still another joined it. *Sharks!* They scraped alongside of the dinghy, nudging at it with their snouts, testing its balance. Jim rowed desperately for the opening in the reef, fearful that one would seize the blade of an oar. After a short, hard pull he reached the gap,

shot through and into the calm water that was alive with light. There was sweat on his forehead, the sweat of fear. He had run one-half of the gauntlet successfully, but he had yet to return.

"Buck up and play the game, old scout!" he murmured, and paddled over to where the largest anchor-stock stood almost upright between the snags of coral. There was a wide platform of the stuff only just covered with the ebbing tide. Jim stepped on it and got to work, fastening his dinghy carefully to the anchor. Then he got back into the boat and faced his return. The tide was running out of the entrance and it swept him along towards the schooner so that he needed only to paddle, which he did with shallow dipped blades. On either side four sharks escorted him, closing in as if they feared they would lose their prey. There came a tug at his starboard oar that almost pulled him overboard, while the dinghy tipped perilously. He had to let go the oar. Instantly, four of the beasts were ravening at

it in a yeast of flame. There was a notch in the stern, and Jim put his remaining oar to it and wagged furiously. *Bump!* A shark rushed and butted the thin planks. Another! Then a frightful wrench at the second oar. Jim fell in the stern, one wrist in the water, snatching it away just in time to save it from the maw of a shark. The brute had turned, and he could see the rows of teeth—the sickly gleam of its belly!

*Bump!* and *Bump!* again. But this was the side of the schooner, and he scrambled to the bows of the bobbing boat, flinging the painter aboard as he jumped for the main stays, got a grip and flung himself aboard, panting, in time to belay the painter.

The job was done, and Jim lay down, his heart pounding furiously. Presently he fell asleep, his head on the curve of his arm.

The dawn broke in bars of lemon against a purple sky. Jim awoke and went over to the skylight. The quartet was still playing. Gooch flung down his cards with a curse.

"That's enough of this," he said. "Sun's up. Let's talk business."

"None to talk," said Daniel Morse aggressively. "I was here first."

"Got to show me. Where's the proof?"

Jim, peering through the tilted skylight, caught sight of the skipper's upturned face and beckoned with his finger. The skipper got up and yawned.

"Let's have breakfast first," he said. "I'll rouse the boys. What's the idea, Jim?" he asked, as he came on deck.

Jim handed him the binoculars, pointing to a board nailed to a wooden post and securely lashed to the stock of an abandoned anchor. There was lettering on it, and it faced so that these words could be read from the schooner:

THIS PEARL FISHERY

LOCATED & OWNED

BY DANIEL MORSE

AND

CAPTAIN BURR.

ALL OTHERS KEEP OFF.

KAPU.

The last word was the one so often written "tabu," meaning forbidden. Jim had added it as a touch that would appeal to the natives in their gossip. The skipper put down his glasses and turned to Jim, slapping his great thigh.

"By Time," he said. "You've turned the trick! That'll hold 'em! They's one thing wrong with it, though," he added.

"What?" asked Jim.

"You left off your own name. An' you can take it from me, it's goin' to go on as third owner. Yes, sir. That goes or me and my schooner don't stay in the deal. When did ye do it?"

Jim told him, and the skipper grinned and extended his great palm, giving Jim a grip that was eloquent.

"Thet's what I call usin' your nerve an' your noddle at the same time," he said. "I'd never have thought of that in a hundred years, an', if I had, I'd sure have hated to go through with it. If you'd tipped over, the sharks

would have made hash out of you in no time."

"They got the two oars," said Jim. "Nearly pulled me overboard.

The skipper shook his head.

"I'll go and put your uncle wise," he said. "Black an' Gooch 'll go home now with a flea in their ears. Beats me how you got the nerve to tackle it. Bad enough in the daytime."

"I was sure scared," said Jim honestly. "'Specially about coming back, with the sharks waiting for me. I reckon I just jollied myself along. Kept on telling myself to buck up."

"You bucked up, all right," roared the skipper. "That's sure a good un." He went off shaking his head and chuckling. At the head of the companion he looked back at Jim and exploded. "*Kapu!* I'll be keel-hauled if that ain't a good un!"

The fire had been started in the galley stove, and Jim felt that he needed a cup of coffee. He glanced over the rail before he went for it. The phosphorescence had died with the daylight, but, splitting the gently heaving sea, he

saw the fins of the sea-tigers, on their ceaseless and ever hopeful patrol, guardians of the pearls of Tia Rau.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LOST GALLEON

Jim, with the Admiral side-stepping on one shoulder, his Uncle Dan's binoculars slung across the other, clambered through the guava bush to Lookout Rock, the highest point of the little isle of Lele Motu, and focussed his glasses on the eastern horizon to catch the first glimpse of the topsails of Captain Burr's expected schooner.

"Not all Captain Burr's at that," thought Jim, proudly. A third of the vessel was Jim's by right of purchase and, as soon as the schooner came to anchor outside the reef-bound lagoon, Jim was to qualify as first mate.

The profits of the expedition to shark-guarded Tia Rau had not proven so great as they had hoped. The lagoon was too constantly disturbed by the outer seas for the best

results of oyster breeding, Captain Burr opined. Later, when the barrier had risen higher, it might furnish better returns.

Still there was enough for Jim out of his share, to buy in with the skipper, and now that the copra season was over his duties as his uncle's storekeeper and supercargo were ended. Daniel Morse had given his consent to Jim's plea to ship with Captain Burr, backed, as the request was, by Burr himself. They were going after *beche-de-mer*, called in the Malay *trepang*, the slugs of the sea-shallows that, when dried, are esteemed a luxury by the Chinese.

Inside the reef that ringed Lele Motu the water was green as an emerald, beyond, it was peacock-blue to the far horizon. There was no wind, though the cumulous trade clouds to the northeast showed like the puffed cheeks of the myrmidons of Aeolus, ready to blow when the order was given. The banners of the co-coa-palms trailed green and glossy; a wonderful, aromatic odor, blent of fragrant bush and

the flowers of Lele Motu, rose like invisible incense; a bosun's bird soared overhead and some boobies and gannets were quarreling on the western point of the island.

On the sea-line itself, sharply defined, two tiny specks of white appeared and faded again the instant that Jim detected them. They were the topsails of the *Manuwai*, pearly in the sun until the shoreward tack threw them into shadow.

Soon, however, the schooner was well up, slipping in towards the land on the breeze that did not yet touch Lele Motu but blew out from the trade-clouds. Jim, bending down and taking the Admiral upon his wrist, hurried back through the bush to the beach to greet the skipper with his uncle's saluting cannon.

Jim, rousing with the roar of the little brass gun all the sleepy *kanaka* boys, had the island whaleboat in the water and its crew aboard before his uncle came yawning from his *siesta* in the palm grove.

As the jibs and staysails came down with the

main, and the schooner, nosing the wind, let go its anchor, Jim steered the double-ender over the coral between waves, brought the whaleboat alongside, sprang at the rail and, rushing aft to where Captain Burr stood smiling at him, suddenly recollected his dignity, steadied himself, touched his forelock and reported, "Come aboard, sir."

"Very good, Mr. Morse," replied the skipper. "Will you snug ship, while I get my stuff up from below?"

Jim thrilled at the "Mister," the official recognition of his matedom. But he knew what to do, and he made the crew—*his* crew—jump to the furling.

*"Ship ahoy, I'm adrift! I'm adrift! Chuck us a rope!"*

Just how much a parrot understands I leave to the theorists. The Admiral had a knack of supplying the right phrases to certain situations. Now he was squawking from the stem of the whale-boat to be taken aboard—disdaining any aid to his clipped wings from the na-

tives, who stood in awe of him as an undoubted "devil bird," a true *kahuna-manu*, a witch-fowl.

Jim tossed down the bight of a rope, to which the bird clung with beak and claws until he gained the deck; once there, he waddled straight to the skipper just emerging from the companionway, climbed up his clothes to his shoulder, sidled to his tanned and leathery cheek and kissed him with a hard but loving tongue, gently tweaking the lobe of his ear.

"*You salty son of a gun, I'm glad to see you,*" said the Admiral.

"You ornery bundle of feathers, thet goes double," said the skipper.

"Here's somethin' to interest you, Jim," he continued, as he handed the youth an envelope. "Clippin' from the Tahiti papers. Copied from the Los Angeles *Times*. You can read it while me and yore uncle gets to gamming. Right in yore line, I reckon."

Jim slipped the clipping into the pocket of his dungarees for the time being. Half an

hour later, while the skipper and Daniel Morse were discussing island gossip, he and the Admiral went away to the grove, where he established himself in the crotch of two close-growing palms to read it.

The skipper had been right. It was in Jim's line, and his eyes widened as he read it through for the second and then for the third time.

Tales of lost treasure, of castaway, golden-freighted galleons, are always cropping up, mostly, alas, in the mouths of unscrupulous adventurers who seek to float an expedition that, at the least, gives them some months of ease and importance. But now, from the archives of the San Jacinto convent of Luzon, there comes to light an authentic, if provokingly abbreviated and not altogether satisfactory, account of the loss of one of the floating castles of Philip of Spain. These, in the early sixteenth century, plied between Spain and the Philippines, carrying vast stores of gold and pearls and gems, as sometime set down in the log of *The Golden Hynde*, the flagship of Sir Francis Drake, who occasionally relieved the Dons of the trouble of carrying their quintals and bars and ingots and all the what-not of their almost fabulous cargoes.

"Gee!" said Jim. "What do you think of that, Admiral? Quintals and ingots and bars of gold!"

"Gold!" repeated the bird, lifting his clipped wings and shuffling up and down the trunk.  
"Gold! Here's a double-eagle, Looey, treat the crowd!"

Jim went on, reading aloud.

We quote, translating literally, an extract from the monkish manuscript. "The galleon *San Salvador* arrived to-day and her gallant commander, Don Ramon y Viera de Lara, brings the sad news of the loss of their consort, the galleon *San Domingo*, which has perished with all its officers, the good priests Fra Ignacio and Fra Pedro (May God rest all their souls!) the soldiers, sailors and slaves; also the cargo, of great value. A pitiless and mighty storm did carry away the mainmast and disable the rudder of the *San Salvador* and still more sadly damage the *San Domingo*, so that for three days the two galleons were in the grip of the furious winds and a strong, swift current, borne far off their course. And, on the evening of the third day, the gale still unabated, despite the prayers of the good priests, Don Ramon did see the *San Domingo* hurled upon

the outlying reef of a savage island, himself powerless to render aid, so great was the fury of the gale. The stormy sun was setting behind a mount shaped like a miter, in this, its first glimpse since the commencement of the gale, and, three days later, when Don Ramon had made shift to effect repairs, he did strive long and ardently to find this same isle in the hope that there might be some survivors.

"But, from lack of reckoning and baffled by the same swift currents and hampered with a makeshift rudder, he did fail to find the place and so did reluctantly complete his own voyage in safety."

So now, come all ye romantic adventurers and practical mariners, ye have only to locate a miter-mount on an islet near the ancient lane of these same galleons, allowing for the leeway of the gale and estimating the trend of the currents and there awaits you this same "cargo of great value." Who will find the galleon *San Domingo* and its precious freight? It is safe to say that many will dream of and, perhaps, some one essay its recovery.

Jim looked out between the palm boles, and saw a vision of two great galleons a-sailing, with their high poops, carven and gilded, their lofty prows, their swelling sails with the trailing pennants topping them, the culverins and

cannonades and demi-cannon grinning from the tiers of ports, armored figures on their decks; gliding on the tide, gold-freighted, ships of a medieval time, sea-castles proclaiming the might of Spain. The vision shifted to a stormy sunset, a raging sea, one galleon wallowing, and, beyond her, backed by a mitered mountain and a ruffle of gale-tormented palms, the sister ship crashing upon a spouting reef!

"Gee!" exclaimed Jim again. And then, "Jiminy!" as he thoughtfully folded up the precious clipping, captured the Admiral and went to seek Captain Burr.

"No," said the skipper, "I don't especially remember a miter-mountain, a miter bein', I take it, the sort of split crown bishops wear, like they have 'em on the chess board? There's all sorts of divided crags, and it all depends from the point of view what shape they might strike you as havin'. Also, all this was four hundred years ago. The island might have sunk, or, more like, have been twisted all out of shape by some eruption. And the galleon might have

gone to pieces or been sand-covered, or a dozen things might have happened to her. That newspaper chap is sort of romantic, himself, I reckon, in figgerin' anyone 'ud fit out an expedition to find her. Needle in a haystack's a joke beside a job like that."

He caught the swift disappointment that shadowed Jim's face.

"Not that I say it ain't possible," he said. "We'll keep an eye out for that miter, you an' me, Jim. There's no tellin'. But *trepang*'s sure and treasure's mostly found in books."

"But there were lots of galleons that never turned up," said Jim, loath to see his dreams vanish. "I used to read about them in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, back in California. I always was interested in them—and in Drake. Gold would keep, and salt water couldn't hurt pearls."

"No more it could," assented Burr soberly. "We're sailing early in the mornin' to the Tonga Group. You keep your eyes peeled an', if you sight a miter-mountain, you an' me'll

go galleon huntin', on the off chance. You've got a say-so in the schooner now, you know."

And that night Jim dreamed of quintals and of ingots, of golden plate and strings of gleaming gems. He picked up one mass of jewels and it turned into a bird that was the Admiral who protested vigorously.

*"Tumble out, ye lubbers! Show a leg!"*

It was the Admiral, sure enough, perched in the open window, the sunrise making him indeed a bird of gems.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MITER-MOUNTAIN

Three weeks later, one night, with the moon due to rise, Jim at the wheel, steering by the lowest star of the Southern Cross, the skipper asleep in the cabin, the Admiral in his shrouded cage with his wise head tucked beneath his wing, the dreamed-for, the improbable, happened. To port, almost abeam, a dim blur showed where a lonely island lifted. They had been a long while coming up with it, though there was a fair breeze across the quarter and Jim sensed that they were in the grip of those mysterious South Sea currents that seemed to hold and compel a ship as if, as the ancients believed, sea-sirens were guiding it to some magic isle. Behind the blur, gradually rendering it more distinct, investing it slowly with a brightening radiance, the moon was slowly rising.

Suddenly the blur became a defined shape, a cone, deep-rifted, the shining orb sectioned in the cleft.

It was the miter-mountain!

Jim needed no second look. He knew it. He had known all along the newspaper story was going to come true, that they were going to find the galleon.

Jim scuffed a sleeping deck-boy with his foot and bade him take the wheel. He darted to the open skylight and shouted down,

“Oh, Captain Burr! Come up! Please come up on deck!”

He heard the pad of the skipper’s feet as he rolled out of his bunk, and soon Burr rose from the companionway, alert.

His keen old eyes followed the direction of Jim’s outstretched arm.

“Shiver my garboard strake!” he said slowly. “It’s the miter-mountain, sure enough!”

“And we’re in a stiff current,” said Jim eagerly. “It’s been holding us back ever since you turned in.”

"We're goin' to get the galleon," declared Jim firmly.

Captain Burr, his back toward Jim, winked at the moon.

"We'll have a try for it, as sure's you're livin'," he said.

On the second afternoon Jim faced the skipper ruefully on the beach of Miter Island. It was not of great size, this volcanic upshoot from the ocean's bed, and they had thrice surveyed its strand and reef for any sign of Jim's Golden Galleon, the *San Domingo*.

"It's tough, Jim," said Burr, soberly, "but I'm feared this ain't the spot, or else the ship has been battered to pieces long ago. Currents change and islands shoot up and down. The beach is too narrer, 'cept in two or three places, for her to have stranded, and we've poked at all the likely humps. They's reefs reachin' out all 'round here. Seems like, if this had been the place that other ship, the *San Salvador* or whatever it was, would have sure got hung up here too."

Jim dug his toes into the sand dejectedly.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "Only—only—I was sure this was the island. Something seemed to tell me so."

"Thet often happens when we hope hard enough," said the skipper. "Now, we can't get out of the reef till tide serves an' that's two hours yet. What d'ye want to do, Jim? Take another look at one or two places, or catch us some fresh fish for supper?"

"I'll fish," said Jim, with disappointment lumping in his throat. "We've been all over it." Two of the crew helped him shove off the whaleboat, but he waved them away from joining him. He wanted to be alone and fight off his chagrin. After they sailed from the island he was not going to say anything more about galleons, or think of them, if he could help it. The skipper was right about the needle in a haystack. Only——!

He deftly wagged his steering oar and the boat glided over the wonderful marine gardens of the lagoon, a miniature forest of green

and red and golden growths, sponges here and there and the live coral, with shoals of fishes of all shapes and hues oaring their ways in between the groves. He baited with fresh-baked breadfruit for sea-bream, waiting to drop his hook into the deepest parts of the basin, looking overside as he went. On the beach Captain Burr regarded him with a friendly, sympathetic glance.

"It's too darned bad the lad couldn't find his galleon," he muttered, and then joined the ever somnolent Admiral in a nap. For fifteen minutes he snored resonantly in the shade and then jumped up. The native boys were running to the water's edge. Jim, far down the lagoon, was leaping up and down in the rocking whale-boat and shouting something.

The whaleboat came fast towards the little crowd. Jim had got down to business with the steering oar. That his eyes were opened to twice their normal size was very evident to the watchers.

"I've found it!" he cried as he neared the beach. "*I've found the galleon!*"

The skipper and the natives caught the inflection of his voice, and splashed waist-deep through the shallows, climbing into the boat, where Captain Burr roared his orders and the *kanakas* bowed the oars in their efforts, Jim asprawl over the stem, peering into the depths.

"Way enough!" Jim cried, scrambling back.  
"Back water, all!"

The whaleboat floated almost motionless, her way subsiding. Burr snatched up a water-glass, a box with the top off and the bottom glazed for use in locating oyster beds.

Far below, yet plain in the translucent water, loomed a vast bulk, encrusted, weed-grown. A hull half sunk in bottom ooze, a rearing platform that must once have been the poop and, most potent token of all, the stump of a mast, wreathed with fronds, barnacled, but still a mast, with the crow's nest mounted on it like a vast sea toadstool!

Captain Burr reached for Jim's fishing line and tied a heavy sinker to it, plumbing the depth. Then he measured off the dripping cord.

"Eighteen, make it nineteen fathoms," he said. "Humph!"

The "humph!" struck on Jim's tautened nerves like a heavy blow.

"That isn't much, is it?" he asked. "Takua can go down to twenty fathoms. He's done it many a time."

"To grab a few oysters and risk the bends. But not to do any work. And they ain't many Takuas. It's the galleon, right enough, Jim. You've located it. But, as she lies, all cluttered up and filled with muck, this is an engineerin' job. It's goin' to cost money to get at what she's got inside of her, Jim. A heap of money."

"And we've got to get out of this mighty quick," he went on. "Look at that sky. We can't wait the tide. We'll have to haul out. Never mind, Jim, we've got the position. We

can come back whenever we want to. And we'll talk it all over, soon 's we get clear of this land."

The result of talking it over did not entirely suit Jim, but at last he gave in to the skipper's arguments. It would take more money than they could lay their hands on, he found, a good many thousand dollars, to transport divers and lighters and the necessary machinery from Tahiti to Miter Island.

They might have to blast the hull apart, the captain fancied. In one way and another it was a risk. And it would be policy to form a company, with the discovery set as an equal interest against the stockholders' capital, he declared.

"It's your find, Jim-boy," he said. "You can do what you like about it, but that's my advice. They's plenty men in Tahiti'll take my word for it that we've found it and they've got the money to put up. I'll see that you get the long end of the sharing: We'll hold out for fifty-one per cent. Thirty of that'll go to you,

twenty-one to me as part owner in the schooner."

"Me?" protested Jim. "Why, we're equal partners!" And he stuck to it until the skipper gave in, resolving, as he had long ago resolved, that what he had would eventually go to the lad who had taken up permanent quarters in his lonely heart.

## CHAPTER VII

### KIDNAPPED

As the skipper had prophesied, it was not hard in that adventurous region to form a company with sufficient working capital. The project took the fancy of all Tahiti and spread around to the Society, the Cook, the Austral groups, as far as the Marquesas and the Low Archipelago. It was not long before Captain Burr was refusing eager, would-be purchasers of stock every minute of the day.

They had passed by Lele Motu on their way to Tahiti without calling, for Burr laid down the principle that "once you locate anything good, you can't keep it secret no-how," and they wanted to head off, as far as possible, the horde of pearl-hunters and other sea-gamblers who would scour all Polynesia, if only they got a hint of where the Miter Mountain raised its cleft.

Jim had no easy time answering many questions and divulging nothing. He was the hero of the hour. The skipper had given him all credit of the discovery, and the papers had written him up and cabled about his find and sent long letters to the mainland press. But he avoided interviews as much as possible, while he waited feverishly for arrangements to be perfected for the salvage of the *San Domingo*.

One afternoon, while Captain Burr was busy with details, Jim wandered down the beach to a little nook, by a waterfall that had carved a stairway for itself in the cliff some two miles from Tahiti.

It was hot and the water, splashing merrily over its terraces, lulled him from day-dreams to a deeper slumber. The dreams faded. A nightmare came instead, or a daymare, no less horrible. It seemed as if the cliff had fallen and buried him. A frightful weight was on his chest so that he could hardly breathe. Neither could he see. The earth heaved under

him, he was lifted up, being carried . . .!

Then he heard gruff voices and knew he was actually being borne swiftly, and none too gently, along an upland trail. Branches swished across his face. He struggled, but his arms and legs were bound, his eyes were blindfolded.

“Quit your wrigglin’, you young imp!” said a harsh voice.

“Give him a tap over the head, Bill,” said another.

But Jim subsided and the threatened blow did not come. His wits worked swiftly. He had been captured while asleep. Kidnapped! By white men. For what? To gain information as to the whereabouts of the galleon, the position of Miter Island!

Captain Burr had pointed out certain rough-looking characters to him two days before.

“They’d scuttle a ship or cut a throat to get hold of a find like we got,” said the skipper. “All the pirates ain’t dead yet, Jim. Give ’em a wide berth.”

And now they had caught him napping! He burned with shame. He was trussed, helpless! But he was not going to let them get away with it. Not even if . . .!

Captain Burr would miss him, would guess what had happened, he reasoned. They would search the island for him. They would surely find some trail. All he had to do was to hold out. He set his jaw and willed himself to endurance. It was *his* galleon, and, boy though he was, he would not give up the secret.

How long they traveled he could not tell, but they climbed constantly, and he could guess by the smells that they were in deep forest. The men carrying him grumbled as they sometimes tripped over vines. At last they set him on his feet and took the bandana from his eyes. Some one loosened his ankles.

“Keep yore eyes front,” said a black-bearded, broad-shouldered man who seemed to be the leader. He was one of the men the skipper had warned him against, a Captain Frost,

known as a blackbirder, a man who recruited labor from unwilling islands, a smuggler, a crooked gamester. "And walk up!"

Jim's legs were numb from the tight cords, but he did his best, and they went along a narrow bush-trail that traversed the shoulder of a mountain thick with tropical growth. They passed above the trees to barren slopes of fire-scarred rock, fissured and grottoed. A narrow pass opened and they went through to a bowl set between tall precipices where grew short turf and a few scanty shrubs. There was a spring of water in the middle of the bowl. Before the dark mouth of a cave in one cliff a man was tending a fire.

"Got him?" he gloated. "Good work, Frosty!"

Frost scowled.

"Cut out names. We'll get right down to business," he said. "Get the kid in the cave. I'll talk to him."

Jim was hustled into the gloomy hollow and his feet tied once more. His hands were still

bound. "Now then," said Frost, "you ain't nobody's fool, buddy. You know what we're after. Sooner you come through, the better for all parties."

Jim had been thinking what he should say, and he answered without hesitation.

"You want the position of the island," he said. "I don't know it. Captain Burr took the reckonings. I . . ."

Frost cuffed him heavily.

"None of that," he said. "We know what we're doin'. Don't you lie to us or . . . Savvy?" He made a swift gesture across his throat. "We aim to get that loot," he said, "an' we're goin' to get it." He took out of his pocket a little bundle of papers, clippings of press-print, Jim noticed.

"This here," said Frost, "is every word that has been printed in Tahiti about the *San Domingo*. I've got 'em by heart. I'll give 'em to you for a scrapbook," he went on sardonically. "And, in one of 'em, your friend Burr tells what a bright youngster you are and

how you sighted the island and spotted the galleon in the lagoon and how you're a partner of his and actin' first mate. An' how you've took to navigation so's you can run the schooner almost as good as him.

"Some of it may be guff, but he comes out strong about the navigation. What's more, you've owned up to it to a dozen men. Bragged a bit, I reckon. So don't you lie to me about you not knowin' the position or," he glanced out of the cave to where the others sat about the fire, "I'll toast your feet first an' slit your windpipe afterwards, if you don't come through."

"If you kill me, you won't find out about the galleon," said Jim stoutly, though his courage quailed at the man's leering ferocity.

"You might beg off bein' killed afore we're halfway through with it," said the ruffian. "An' we might be a bit disappointed, if you should be stubborn too long. Your outfit starts pretty soon, an' we aim to get a start on it. They ain't no copyright on thet island.

If we gets there first, we'll hold our own. We ain't over gentle; none of us, an', if you disappointed us, I say, we might kill you, just out of cussedness."

"Hurry up there, Frost," broke in one of the men, of whom they were ten in all. "Give him the third degree."

Frost took no notice of the interruption.

"Come through, buddy," he said.

"And if I tell you," asked Jim, "what are you going to do with me?"

"Now that's more sensible. Sloane, the chap who was here when we came up, is goin' to entertain you till we come back. It's a nice quiet spot, but kinder lonely. We had a lot of trouble pickin' it out. There's a lookout to sea, savvy? Sloane's got a glass and he'll keep watching for us. We won't come in too close, but we'll set a signal. When he gets a signal that the dope you handed out is right, you go free. If the dope is wrong . . . ?" His pause was more effective than any threat.

Jim shut his eyes and braced himself. Then he opened them again.

"I won't tell you," he said. "You don't dare to kill me. They'll find it out some time and they'll find *you* out. There are too many big men in this. They'll get you some day."

In the half light of the cave he could see that his words were not without their effect. Frost scowled.

"Oh, we don't dare, don't we?" he mocked. "For a tenth of what is in that galleon I'd croak a dozen. And my mates is that kind, too, you can lay to that."

But he went out and talked the matter over in low tones. Jim, trying to think, could hear them arguing and quarreling. He figured that the story of setting a signal was false. They would probably tell Sloane to hold him a few days, then let him go. But Sloane would have to join his fellows without danger from Jim's information. The best way he could twist it, it looked grim. He listened closely, but he could not distinguish many

words. The will of Frost evidently dominated them and presently the latter came back into the cave.

"We're goin' to have some grub," he said. "Just to show you we aim to be on the square with you, if you come through, we're goin' to give you some grub, too. You eat an' think it over. We're heatin' some stones in the fire an' they ain't for cookin' grub. They're for warmin' cold feet. Now tuck into this."

He laid down a couple of bananas and some cold meat, with a tin cup of hot coffee. It was cold on the heights and the smell of the coffee was good to Jim, thought he felt he could not eat anything solid. Frost undid his hands and then untied his feet.

"You can't get away," he said grimly.  
"Don't try it."

Left alone, Jim sipped at the coffee. The little bundle of clippings lay close by, and he idly looked at them while the men ate outside. It was still light enough to read, and, as the package fell apart, he saw the familiar head-

lines of the original article taken from the *Los Angeles Times*. He knew it by heart, he thought, but, almost unconsciously, he read it over. And then a dim memory strengthened, something he had read in the Bancroft Library, long ago came back to him, little by little. He sat up, centering his will upon the recollection until he was sure of it.

Sloane came into the cave with Frost carrying two flat slabs of lava carefully balanced on two smaller flat pieces. He set them down so close to Jim that the latter could feel their glowing heat.

"How about it?" demanded Frost, and his tone was final.

"I'll tell you," said Jim. Frost nodded.

"That's the stuff. Better not lie, though, sonny. I'm warnin' you."

"I'm telling you the truth," said Jim. His voice carried conviction even to that distrustful company. Sloane had gone out with the news and now they crowded into the cave,

darkening in the failing light, eager to hear the figures that meant so much to them.

"It was 22' 37" South. 168' 19" West," said Jim.

Frost repeated the figures, going to the cave-mouth to jot them down, then checking them a second time.

"That's right," said Jim. The men commenced to talk excitedly until Frost stopped them.

"Come on," he ordered. "I reckon that's the straight goods. If it ain't, we'll skin this young liar alive when we git back. An' I'll see that the job's done right," he added. "Sloane, you know *yore* job. No time to waste, boys."

Sloane stood in the cave mouth watching them go. The light was going rapidly in the bowl surrounded by the high mountain walls. In a few minutes it would be dark, save for the starlight. In an hour or so the moon would rise. Sloane turned and came back into

the cave. He seemed elated, even good-natured, at the thought of his share in the treasure.

"You were a wise kid to come through," he said. "Frost would sure have scraped the hide off ye. Better eat that grub, hadn't ye?"

"I don't want to eat," said Jim.

"Ye don't? Then stick out yore hands. I'll let you run round a bit, if you behave yoreself, daytimes while I'm awake, but, when I sleeps, you get tied up. Now yore feet. I'm goin' to snooze out there by the fire. I'll fetch you a blanket." This he did, and then curled himself up by the fire. Jim did not stir for a few minutes; then he turned over, shifting the blanket that he was powerless to adjust. The scent of burning wool instantly assailed his nostrils, and he rolled back again, sitting up cautiously and looking out at Sloane. Apparently his guard had gone to sleep. Hope leaped up in Jim. He was confident that he had sent Frost and his gang away on a fool's errand and he had trusted to escape from

Sloane before they could return, and the chance had come without delay.

The odor of burning wool came from the frowsy blanket, scorching on the hot stones brought in by Sloane. Lava as they were, and picked for their heating qualities, they still retained most of their heat.

Jim hitched himself as close to them as he dared, fearful of rousing Sloane, and held his wrists to the blunt edge of one of the stones. The heat scorched his hands and wrists, but it scorched the rope as well. He was forced to make three efforts, while great blisters formed on his skin, but, at last, the charred rope fell apart. Swiftly and painfully he untied his ankle cords and then, free, lay down again and pulled the blanket over him. Sloane might not be asleep, and, anyway, he wanted to wait for the light of the moon before attempting the steep trail to the sea.

After long waiting the sky showed that the moon had risen. The bowl was dark, but outside its wall the land would be flooded with

light. And Sloane was snoring. Jim was wearing rubber sneakers, and, inch by inch, he worked out of the cave. Sloane stirred restlessly and Jim froze. The kidnapper had somehow tossed aside his blanket and the nip of the mountain air was disturbing his slumber. He lay on his back, one arm flung wide. At his right side, nearest Jim, the handle of a pistol showed in a holster, some bit of metal work reflecting the fire. He was in Jim's path, and Jim, seeing that Sloane's awakening was imminent, forced the issue. Bent double, he advanced. A coal fell in the embers and a little flame leaped up. It was reflected in the eyes of Sloane, drowsily opening.

In a flash Jim stooped, snatched the pistol from the holster and started for the narrow opening to the bowl, as Sloane, half stupidly, got to his feet, unable to realize as yet that the lad he had so carefully bound was free and escaping. With a savage roar he lunged after his late prisoner. He was a lean man and

long-legged and, fast as Jim flew, Sloane gained on him, racing at an angle to cut him off at the gap.

Jim turned, pistol in hand.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" he cried. Sloane laughed and came on, risking Jim's marksmanship. At the flash of the gun he jumped high and to one side but fell groaning. Jim's bullet had hit him just above the knee.

Jim walked cautiously to the writhing man and saw the nature of the injury. It was serious but not dangerous, he decided.

"I'll send some one up for you, Sloane," he said. The wounded man replied with a volley of curses, and Jim left him. It was no easy task to work through the jungle, but he knew he had only to keep downward to make the beach at last, and, save when he plunged into dark forest, the moon helped. He hobbled into Tahiti near dawn. He and Burr had been staying aboard their schooner at night, so Jim borrowed a shore canoe and put off. There was no light aboard the vessel, no natives were



on the deck, no one was in the cabin; there was only the Admiral in his cage, covered with his night-cloth.

Jim lit the swinging lamp, and the Admiral squawked; he found some food, dressed his blistered hand with grease and flour and then turned into his own bunk. He had slept about five minutes, it seemed, when he was shaken by the shoulder and the gruff voice of Captain Burr, a bit tremulous, was greeting him.

"We been out all night searchin' for you, son," said the skipper. "Four parties of us. An' me comin' home, all busted-up, to find you asleep in yore own bunk! Where in Time have you been?"

Jim told him.

"We'll send up for Sloane," said the skipper, grimly. "An' we'll overhaul Mr. Frost in the Commissioner's launch. You did right to give 'em the position, Jim. They'd have murdered you."

"I didn't give it to them because I was afraid," said Jim. "At least, I was afraid,"

he corrected, "but I wasn't going to tell until I happened to think of something. I didn't hope to get away so soon, of course. . . ."

"All's well that ends well," said the skipper. "We'll beat 'em to it, easy."

Jim grinned.

"I think we'd better let them go ahead," he said. "But we'll have to call our company off." Burr looked at him in puzzled fashion.

"They didn't clip you over the head, did they?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, I'm not cracked," replied Jim cheerfully. "But I'm mighty glad Frost left those clippings in the cave, or we'd have spent a lot of other people's money for nothing. I told you I'd read a good bit about those galleons. Well, sir, it wasn't till I read that first article through again that I remembered something.

"You see, those two galleons were going *to* the Philippines, not *from* them. And the gold and pearls came *from* the Philippines. What they took there made up a 'cargo of great value' all right, but not valuable to us, or to

Frost and Company. You see, Captain Burr, the outward-bound galleons all stopped at South American ports and took on cargo of *cinchona* bark that grows there and was invaluable in the Philippines for curing fevers; worth its weight in gold, maybe. Anyway, the *San Domingo* was laden with *quinine*, and Frost is welcome to what is left of it after four hundred years, isn't he?"

Captain Burr stared and gaped and burst into a great guffaw.

"Now that's what comes from bein' a scholar," he said. "Shiver my garboard strake, if that ain't a joke! *Qui-nine*—and them racing for gold!"

"*Gold!*" shrieked the Admiral, true to form. "*Gold! Gold! Gold!* Set 'em up again, *Looey, the treat's on me!*"

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOUR AND TWENTY BLACKBIRDS

"Jim," said Captain Burr, "we've got a chance to make a little extra money before we start on the reg'lar trip, taking a couple of dozen blackbirds back to their home island. Good money in it, but not much trouble. What d'ye say?"

It was great to be consulted like that, even if one was mate and actual partner in the schooner *Manuwai*, south-sea trader. Jim knew that he was both big and handy for his sixteen years, but he was fully conscious that, outside of a growing ability to handle the *Manuwai* and a certain knack of bossing the *kanaka* crew, he was a good deal of a green-horn. This very proposition proved it. How there could be much money in shipping black-

birds back to their home island, he could not see. If it had been parrots, now, like the Admiral, aswing and asleep in his cage that hung from the forward preventer-stay—but blackbirds?

There were a good many fine qualities about Jim Morse, or he would not have been chumming with Captain Burr, nor mate of the *Manuwai*. One of those qualities was Jim's lack of false pride and his willingness to ask questions. The two things go together very largely.

"Are they valuable?" he asked. "Do they sing?"

A twinkle grew in the skipper's one eye, till it looked like a brightening star at twilight. He slapped his thigh with a hairy hand and leaned forward till his beard swept his knees.

"I got to laff, Jim," he said, as his tan turned to crimson. "I got to laff—or bust! Do they sing? Shiver my garboard strake, but that's a good un!"

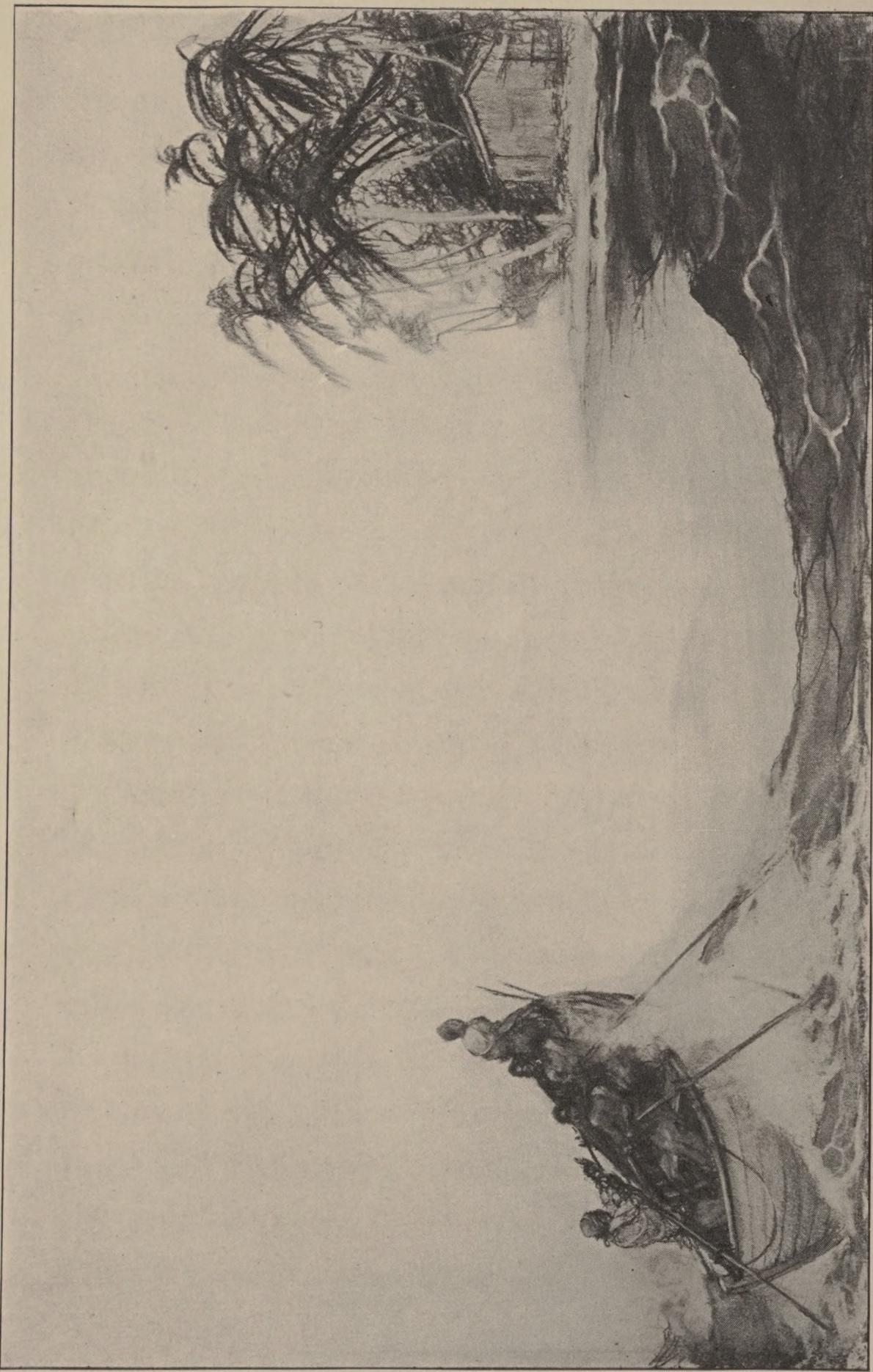
He broke out into a guffaw that awoke the

somnolent *kanakas*, snoozing forward in the shadow of the rail, and brought a protest from the Admiral, rudely roused from his *siesta*.

"*Look out,*" screamed the parrot. "*Tumble up, you monkey-faced sons of swabs, here comes a squall!*"

Jim's own face was red, but the skipper's good-nature was irresistible, and he joined in the laughter, though he knew it was against himself. Tears dimmed the sparkle of the captain's solitary eye, and he wiped it as the end of his guffaws rumbled away in his throat.

"Son," he said, "these blackbirds wear feathers all right, but only in their hair, as a gen'ral rule, but they ain't no Carusos among 'em. Ye see the plantations are always hard put to it for labor, and, from 'way back, some folks has made a specialty of supplyin' it. Recruitin' they call it. They ain't always been partickler—and no more has the plantations—where the recruits come from or how willin' they was to sign contracts. These recruiters called the *kanakas*, they picked off the beaches,



The great seas, hissing and cresting, surged up before his eyes, racing in, bearing them like a cork in a mill race. See page 8



'blackbirds.' Something like the old slave days back in the States, it used to be.

"A schooner sails up to an atoll, and either coaxes the natives aboard, gets 'em below an' claps hatches on 'em, or else herds 'em red-handed with guns for persuaders. You may lay to it that the skipper that lands a bunch from one island don't go back to it in a hurry. He wouldn't be welcome an' they might be waitin' for him. Another schooner might come along, though, and run into trouble. Take it full and by, it was kind of excitin' and sort of risky, 'blackbirding' was.

"Government control has altered things a bit. You mustn't force your laborer, and he has to be signed up before the Commissioner, reg'lar, with a contract for so much and so many years and a clause and a forfeit to see him landed back on his home island at the end of the contract. The Kualipe Plantation has four and twenty of 'em all ready to be paid off and delivered, and we can get the job. They'll live on deck an' . . ."

He broke off. Jim was perched on the after rail singing softly, so as not to miss what the skipper was saying,

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,  
Four and twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie.  
When the pie was opened, the birds began to  
sing;  
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the  
king?

Captain Burr grinned and scratched his beard.

"I ain't heard that since I was knee-high to myself," he said. "But in the old days, Jim, when things went wrong, it wasn't the blackbirds that got baked and it wasn't blackbirds that got served up to the king."

"You mean?" Jim's gray eyes were round with excitement.

"Long pig! Sometimes the natives got the recruiters instead of t'other way round. Then they'd make pig out of 'em in the stone ovens. Take a look at that companion. See them slashes?"

Jim nodded. He had seen them before, deep cuts in the frame of the hooded opening to the cabin stairs.

"The floors was worse," said the skipper. "Splintered up from the outside and shot through from the inside. I did the shooting. They was a deck full of Malaita fuzzyheads tryin' to persuade me to come out, with axes and clubs and spears. The *Manuwai* got on a reef, tryin' to make out of the lagoon on a flood tide, we bein' in a bit of a hurry. And, when you get on the reef in those latitudes, it's touch an' go, most usually 'go.' If the barkentine *Dolphin* hadn't been to loo'ard and heard the shootin', I'd have been served up like one of them blackbirds you were singin' about. Fortunately I had my skylights grated over but ever since then I've always carried a little dynamite and some caps an' fuses. It comes in handy for reef-blastin' or for gettin' a mess of mullet, and it sure does discourage a gang of rampagin', bloodthirsty *kai-kais* (man-eaters)."

Jim ran his finger down the grooves made by the hatchets of the savages, visualizing the scene, the yelling natives with their lime-dyed hair, frizzed in fan-shape, the ragged lobes of their ears stretched with shell circles till they touched their shoulders, naked save for strips of barkcloth, teeth filed triangularly, like the sharks' teeth that studded their weapons. He wondered whether Captain Burr had been a recruiter and ached to ask him. They told all sorts of tales about Captain Burr on the Tahiti waterfront, called him a "one-eyed old pirate," a "pearl poacher," and other epithets, but Jim knew him as a genial, unselfish, generous and eminently capable trader-skipper, and took the stories with a grain of salt. Burr's eye was twinkling again.

"Tell you the whole yarn some day, son," he said. "Tell you how I lost my eye, too. Some day I wore it out lookin' for the long end of bargains." He chuckled. "What do you say about the blackbirds? We have to take 'em to Tanavau, that's midway between the

Tongas and the Fijis. The natives claim they don't belong to either group. Anyway, it don't take us far off our route, and they's good money in it."

"Sounds like good business to me," said Jim. "Do we have to ship extra grub for them?"

"*Poi*, cocoanuts and dried fish fixes 'em. They'll supply their own. Bring it aboard with 'em from the plantation. They'll be ready for us when we make Kualipe Landing to-morrow 'long about noon."

Jim decided that the "landing" at Kualipe was misnamed. There was only an open roadstead where blind breakers tumbled over the reef and left but the narrowest of openings for a whaleboat to pass perilously where the holding ground was treacherous and the shore alee. The plantation lands were low, with pineapples growing vigorously in red soil, and, back of them, the coconut groves. The *Manuwai* cruised off-and-on, after Captain Burr had run a signal up to the main spreaders.

Presently, Jim saw a crowd of natives clustering on the beach, milling about some central core of commotion. A white man in cotton ducks came down and broke up the meeting. A whaleboat was launched, packed with *kanakas* who crowded the rowers and stood up gesticulating and shouting to their fellows, as the latter dashed deep into the shore surf and tossed aboard supplies while giving farewell messages.

At last the boat broke away from its cordon and came over the crested water like some great water-striding insect, Jim's elevation on the deck of the schooner allowing him to see over the reef breakers. At the narrow entrance he lost sight of the boat in a smother of foam from which it emerged half-swamped, the excited homeseekers yelling at the top of their lusty lungs.

Captain Burr's own voice overtopped the noise of the Tanavauans as he superintended their boarding the *Manuwai*. He knew their dialect and soon reduced them to some sort of

control as the whaleboat rose and fell in the heavy groundswell.

"Look out, you lubbers," he shouted to the oarsmen, "you'll scrape all the paint off my planks! Get them fenders out, Jim. Billi-Boy, chuck 'em a line! Hey, you—you chattering *kekko* (monkey) with the steering-oar, be careful, or I'll plenty quick make some trouble walk alongside you. And you,"—he switched back to Tanavauan,—and Jim could not follow him. Whatever his order was, it was disregarded. Like so many sheep following a senseless, stubborn leader, they made frantic leaps for the rail of the schooner as the whaleboat lifted on a wave. Some gained it, the rest fell short. The skipper frowned, but Jim had to laugh at the scene of mad confusion. Calabashes of *poi*, cocoanuts, bundles of dried fish, personal belongings wrapped in gaudy bandanas, were being hurled from the boat over the rail of the *Manuwai*. Tanavau natives were clutching at ropes flung by the schooner's crew, clambering up and over

the freeboard, jabbering, their mouths open and their eyes white-circled.

"Cast off there, Billi-Boy!" ordered the skipper. "Jim, herd that bunch up for'ard and run a line across the deck abaft the foremast. I'll tell 'em something presently that'll keep 'em tother side of it. More trouble than shippin' a whole menagerie, 'n' I did that once."

Jim drove them forward without much trouble, though they were a savage-looking pack, and Billi-Boy, boatswain and quartermaster to the *Manuwai*, saw that their belongings were given them, whereupon they started to sort them while the schooner fell off into the wind and nosed away from Kualipe towards the open sea. Captain Burr called Billi-Boy to the wheel and beckoned to Jim.

"Here is where the Admiral comes in useful," he said. "Bring him along, son. I'll put the fear of something into their hearts that'll make 'em behave. I'm goin' to tell them the Admiral is a devil-devil bird, which ain't so far from the truth when he's peevish, an'

that he'll watch 'em and report to me all they do an' all they think. Wait till they hear him talk. Now seize him up in the forestays with a bit of marlin."

Jim secured the cage, and the gaudy Admiral, in his uniform of green and crimson and gold, sidled across his perch to the wires where he looked down upon the natives, listening to the skipper's forceful harangue, with a head cocked to one side, as if harkening to instructions. The eyes of the islanders rolled in his direction fearfully, and then Captain Burr spoke to the parrot in Tanavau. The Admiral bobbed his jeweled head up and down three times solemnly, half-opened his wings and flapped them.

"*Look out,*" he shrilled. "*Look out, you silly swabs, look out for squalls!*"

The islanders, through their late foremen on the plantation, knew some beach-English, enough to recognize some of the words and all of the inference of the Admiral's adjuration. Here was a devil-devil bird indeed! A bird

that understood and listened and talked, oh, a very great devil-devil bird! They shuffled uneasily before they finally heeled down on their haunches, and Jim smiled many times that afternoon as he saw first one and then another casting fearful glances at the feathered wizard who, for his part, kept his eye cocked on them watchfully, out of a curiosity that they took for obedience to his master's orders.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ADMIRAL AND TROUBLE

The weather held fair as they headed up for Tanavau, with the south-east trade blowing steadily across on their quarter, and the islanders settled down contentedly enough, disturbed only when Billi-Boy and his assistants flushed the foredeck with buckets of brine, for the men from Tanavau were a shiftless, dirty lot, and, as the skipper said to Jim,

“ ’Tis a good thing for us the wind’s aft, for, if we sailed closehauled, we’d have to bathe every mother’s son of ’em!”

But on the fifth day one of the passengers complained of being ill, refused to eat and curled up in the bows like a sick and friendless dog. The rest gathered round him, muttering. Jim had the deck and the wheel for the first dog-watch, from four until six in the after-

noon, and heard them begin to chant a weird strain that somehow got on his nerves. He called Billi-Boy and asked him what the trouble was. Billi-Boy went forward and reported back.

"Too much trouble I think along those black fellah!" Billi was a brown-skinned Polynesian himself and held all western, and darker, tribes in haughty contempt. "One fella there I think pretty soon he *mäté* (die). Too much sick he think himself, too much trouble walk along his belly. My word, suppose he *mäté*, too much trouble along *us*, I think. Better you speak with the *kapitani*."

Jim handed over the wheel to the competent Billi and went below to the skipper, who himself was not very well, and who had turned in after taking thirty grains of quinine to offset an attack of intermittent island fever and ague. He looked grave at Jim's news.

"I was afraid of something like that," he said. "Those chaps haven't any backbone. I'll go up and see what I can do. Get me my

medicine chest. A little ginger and calomel 'll sometimes buck 'em up. Main thing is to persuade 'em the medicine is strong enough. Good thing my spell of fever's over."

Jim followed him up on deck and into the bows. It was a good two hours yet to sunset and the light held, but the wind was already failing with the close of day, and the schooner slipped through the water with little noise. The chant was monotonously going on, and the islanders, squatted in a three-quarters' circle about the sick man, looked up sullenly at the whites. They would not answer the skipper, and the sick man refused to do anything but moan and turn his face to the rail. The captain tried in vain to make him take the dose he offered. At last one of the men spoke, lashing himself into a temper, and, at the end of his tirade, throwing out his arm with a vindictive gesture to where the Admiral swung in the stays.

"Take down the bird, Jim," said Captain Burr, and Jim caught a note of concern in his

voice that was unusual. He got the cage and both went aft.

"That *kanaka* is going to die," said the skipper.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Jim.

"Whatever it is makes no difference," replied Burr. "Probably got plain bellyache, but he thinks the Admiral has bewitched him and he has made up what he calls his mind that he is going to pass in his checks and they ain't no doctor on earth could cure one of 'em, once they get that way. They just quit. No more gumption than a broken-backed dogfish!"

"But the worst of it is this, Jim. We've taken contract to deliver them at their island and they've got to be taken there. Now, they's a law among these blackbird islanders that is about the same as the law Moses laid down, a life for a life and a tooth for a tooth and so on. On'y they render it this way, a head for a life. Pervidin' they can get it. And they'll try their derndest. If they's any missing from a party taken from one of the beaches

when they're brought back, no matter what he died of, nor how you may try to fix it, thet loss is chalked up against the white men in general and against the party makin' the delivery in partickler. Thet was what they tackled me for, time the *Dolphin* come along. The count on Malaita was shy several heads and they allowed mine might help to even the tally.

"This chap's goin' to die, spite of all we can do, I'm afraid. Even if we got him ashore alive, he'd swear he'd been bewitched by the Admiral, and they'd chalk up one against the *papalangi* (foreigners). It's a serious matter, Jim, and I'm sorry I let you in for it. Not that I'm afraid of 'em, unless something goes almighty wrong, but they's always a risk. Your head an' mine is better on our shoulders than swingin' in a smokehouse for trophies. And, aside from that, don't forget the baking parties."

He scratched his beard and looked at Jim with his one eye clouded.

"We've got to deliver them, haven't we?" asked Jim.

"Sure. We can't take 'em back to Kualipe or any other plantation under the law, now their contracts are closed. No man in his senses would take the deal off our hands with that sick one for'ard."

"Well," said Jim, "this is the way I think about it. You're not worrying on your own account, but on mine. This isn't the first time you've had trouble on the beaches and you know how to handle such things. I'm not afraid, with you. I suppose we can trust Billie-Boy and the rest of our men. I don't see what else there is to do. We can't keep on sailing. We might set them adrift in one of our boats in sight of the island, but I'd hate to go back and have them tell Uncle Daniel, or any one else for that matter, that we were afraid to carry out our contract. And the boat would be a loss. Let's go through with it."

The skipper caught Jim's fist in his own brawny, horny paw and nearly crushed it.

"I knew it," he said. "I'd have banked on it, but I wanted to hear you say it. The on'y thing that worries me, Jim, is my fever. It's got so of late, 'round this season of the year, it don't give me much warnin', an', when it comes, I'm just a soaked rag till it goes. You know that. If I should have a bad spell come on me while the *Manuwai* was in the lagoon, you'd have to take hold. Meantime we'll make our preparations. Whatever happens, we got to keep any of 'em from comin' aboard. We'll start on that work to-morrer."

"The man may not die," Jimmy suggested. Captain Burr only shrugged his shoulders, but the Admiral suddenly screamed,

*"Die, die? Never say die, my lad, never say die!"*

"They say thet bird talks automatic, 'thout thinkin', like a talkin' machine," said the skipper. "But you'll note he's always got the right record handy for the occasion. Ain't you, you horn-beaked, button-eyed son of a sea-bird?" He opened the door of the cage and the Ad-

miral waddled out and clambered to the skipper's shoulder, where he tweaked at his master's ear with careful mandibles and his tongue, gently clucking. Jim got him a banana, peeling it for him, and the Admiral put out one long-toed claw for the titbit.

Jim woke up well towards the end of the middle watch. This Billi-Boy ordinarily held, Jim taking the first morning watch from four until eight, until relieved for breakfast by one of the crew. Something had brought him out of a sound sleep, all standing. The skipper was snoring in his own bunk. For a second or two Jim stood sleepily, wondering what time it was. Then an eerie, ghostly wail, of high-pitched, concerted voices, told him what had awakened him. He had never heard the sound before, but he sensed what it was, the blackbird islanders wailing for their dead.

“*Au-we! Au-we, ta Riatiki mäté!*”

(*Alas, alas, for Riatiki, who is dead!*)

Jim went on deck in his pajamas. Billi-

Boy was at the wheel, bulking dark against the sky, where the stars were still bright. There was but little wind and the sheets had been in-hauled. That taut canvas screened effectually the foredeck whence came the intermittent funeral chant.

"Plenty *pilikea* (trouble) come along by-and-by quick, I think," said Billi in a whisper.

The schooner surged quietly along, spreading a wake of phosphorescence, the cordage gently creaking, the homely sound of the skipper's snore ascending through the open skylight. The native crew lay about amidships, but Jim knew they were not asleep, but listening for the repetitions of the wailing. It came again, and Jim, in the cool air, shivered a little. They sound like South Sea *banshees*, he told himself.

"You're not afraid, are you, Billi-Boy?" he asked aloud.

"Me? Me afraid that kind of black fella? What kind of foolish talk you speak along of me? I speak *pilikea* come, all same I say big

wind he come. Billi not afraid. Not *much*, I jolly you."

Jim took over the wheel at eight bells, and, an hour later, the skipper came on deck, as the sudden dawn was breaking. He walked forward and came back frowning.

"Black looks from our blackbirds," he said. "We should raise Tanavau some time to-morrer morning. Around noon, if the weather don't change. Meantime, we'll get busy."

To the accompaniment of the death-chant, kept up hour after hour, the crew of the *Manuwai* set up stanchions along the rail, where Jim noticed that there were places all ready to receive them, and a bale of barbed wire was broken out from the hold. Three strands of this raised a formidable fence about the ship, necessitating a reef in both main and fore to clear it with the booms. Rifles were brought up, oiled and laid on the skylight aft, with cartridges handy. The skipper overhauled his own pet weapon—a scatter-gun made from a twelve-gauge, double-barreled shotgun, sawed off and

loaded with slugs. He also produced an automatic pistol in a holster attached to a cartridge belt, which he handed over to Jim.

"I've got a long Colt I'm used to," he said. "Now you'd better see how well you can shoot with that and practise a while with a rifle. We've got cartridges enough. Chuck a few bottles over and a packing case or two. Remember to squeeze your trigger up to the last half ounce of resist, never jerk or pull it."

Jim obeyed gladly enough, though there was a certain grimness about this targetry that steadied him down. After a while the skipper came to the stern rail and watched him.

"You've got the makin's of a good shot, Jim," he said. "Good hands and eyes. Distance'll come to you after a while. Did you note that our blackbirds ain't singin' any more? They know what we're up to. Now, I want to show you how to handle this stuff. You got to keep cool and not take too many chances, because they's a lot of one-armed men in this

part of the world who waited just one split of a second too long."

The "stuff" turned out to be greasy-looking, brown sticks, about the size of candles. They were half-sticks of dynamite. To their ends caps had been crimped and short lengths of orange-colored quick-fuse attached.

"I gen'ally use a cheroot to light the fuse," said the skipper, "but you don't smoke and a bit of tow's as good, if you blow on it once in a while to keep it glowing."

He produced the frayed end of a rope that he had dipped in saltpeter and dried in the sun, and ignited it, breathing on it till the oakum was well aglow. At his word Jim tossed over a small empty box from the trade-room, that bobbed gaily away. The skipper lit a fuse, inspected it, waved the dynamite in the air a few times and then hurled it at the box, now falling astern. Just as the explosive touched the sea, a foot or so short of the mark, it went off with a flash and a roar. The sea geysered, a whiff of gases came to them and Jim looked

for the remnants of the box. There were none --but the white belly of an eight-foot shark showed in the wake.

"That settled the chief mourner," said the skipper. "If they'd been a school of mullet anywhere's near, you'd have seen Friday hash. Once the fuse is lit--the length I've fixed 'em--count five, sort of slow, like this, and let her go."

Out of the cabin came the indignant cry of the Admiral.

*"Look out, look out, you son of a swab, you'll sink the blooming ship!"*

"If that bird could write," said the skipper, "I'd make him keep the log."

There was no more wailing that day nor the night that followed. A little before noon on the next day the skipper pointed out a hump of blue on the western horizon, merely a stain of deeper hue against the sky.

"No need for observations this nooning," he said. "We know where we are. There's Tanavau."

## CHAPTER X

### JIM LANDS THE BLACKBIRDS

Tanavau turned out to be a volcanic islet with a thimble-shaped crest and deeply indented sides, a crescent bay bitten on the leeward side with one horn elongated to a low and narrow peninsula that ended in a point where palms grew sparsely. The sides of the mountain were rich with vegetation. From the rocky point, like a bow string stretching across the cord of the crescent bay, flashed a line of pounding breakers, smashing on the reef.

The blackbirds had gathered in the eyes of the schooner, their dead comrade swathed in dirty cloths and strips of matting, with a grimy red bandana bound about the head to close the jaws. They chattered among themselves in a low tone, every little while casting glances at the members of the *Manuwai's* crew that seemed, to Jim, vindictive.

Jim had been casting over ways and means for landing their charges without friction and thought he might have solved the problem. He submitted his conclusion to Captain Burr.

"If we stood well out, Captain," he suggested, "and sent two boats, one to protect the other in case of trouble, couldn't we land them on the point and get off again before those on shore knew what had happened?"

"Send in a covering boat, you mean? It ain't a bad idea, son, but it ain't my way of doin' things. In the first place we are expected, that is, our blackbirds are expected, in some vessel or another. They've got us sighted long ago, and in a few minutes you'll see their canoes comin' off to meet us. Then the beans will be spilled. Now they's only ten of us, all told, on the *Manuwai*. Call it four men to each boat. If we launched they could paddle rings round us in their canoes and shoot us fuller of arrows than a hedgepig has quills. But the main consideration is not ever to let them think you're afraid of 'em in any way,

shape or form. Not lookin' afraid is next best thing to not bein' afraid. I've been afraid heaps of times—not of a bunch of savages in themselves, but of what that bunch might do to me. I don't like bein' carved or cooked any more than the next man. But I never showed 'em I figgered they might get the better of me, and I've learned not to worry. It don't pay. Half the time they's nothin' to worry about an' if they was, worryin' don't help one derned bit.

"Now, then, we ain't got only ourselves to think of. Out in these latitudes we white men have got to stick together. If one weakens, it makes it worse for the next who comes along—and t'other way round. No, sir, we'll sail right into the lagoon an' land 'em shipshape. They ain't got firearms, an', so long as we keep 'em clear of the deck, we're safe. I ain't denyin' the risk, but . . . ?"

"I see," said Jim. "They may get the best of us, but it's just like you told me before—'a white man quits trying.' "

"That's the idee, an' we want to hammer it home to these heathen, every chance we get. See, there come the canoes. The beans will be spilled as soon as we get within hailing distance."

The skipper's figurative beans were spilled sooner than that. When the nearest canoe was half a mile away, one of the Tanavau islanders dived cleanly from the bows of the *Manuwai* and swam at a tremendous pace, arm over arm, towards it. The schooner, under the lee of the mountain, was making only slow progress in a slackening and fitful breeze, but they could see the excitement aboard the canoe swiftly transmitted to the rest. Still there was no show of hostility.

"They want to get us close to shore as possible, and they want to make sure of gettin' their dead body," explained the skipper. "They are tricky and treacherous, but they ain't over and above clever, an' they figger that they may catch us unprepared." He called to Billi-Boy.

"I don't like the look of that reef-gate," he said. "You streak it for the foretop, Billi, and con us in."

The canoes closed in about the schooner, keeping an even distance that enabled the Tanaau natives to maintain a steady jabber of talk with their fellows in the bows. Jim noticed few weapons in the canoes and figured that fact another reason for their present apparent friendliness. The skipper was at the wheel and Billi-Boy began to shout down directions. The *Manuwai* came up a little and headed for the entrance. The tide was at flood, and the current helped give them the steerageway the wind denied. The passage was shaped like an N, set on its side and slightly slanted, necessitating two sharp tacks and rapid handling of the sails. It led between spouting bursts of foam, with here and there creaming coral ledges as a great wave passed and the next curved.

"No use tackling this gate after dark, or 'cept when the tide is right," said Captain Burr,

between his roared-out orders, while he deftly played the wheel.

"Jim, handle the headsails, will you? I'll give the word for the hook. I'll shoot her up, soon's we clear. Fourteen-fathom, the 'Pacific Directory' gives it, good sand and coral."

Jim went forward, as Billi-Boy slid down the halyards from his perch, his duty done as lookout. Down came the canvas and out rattled the cable chain. The *Manuwai* swung to her buried flukes, bows to the still incoming tribe. Captain Burr yelled at the clustering canoes to keep their distance. One after another the blackbirds leaped over until only four were left with the dead body. These set up once more the chant which was promptly echoed from the beach where scores of figures rushed from the bush to greet the newcomers.

"May as well get it over and done with," said the skipper to Jim. "That plaguey fever's comin' on me ag'in an' we want to shoot out through the reef on the turn of the tide. This is no place for a picnic. I'll tell 'em we won't

send in a boat until they all go ashore. They won't take off the corpse themselves, they figger it as so much bait to fetch us on the beach. We'll fool 'em."

He was already beginning to shake with the island fever, and Jim knew that before many minutes he would be helpless in its grip. Captain Burr shook out some quinine crystals into his palm and swallowed them with a grim smile.

"That's what a man gets for livin' out of his own latitudes too long, Jim. White man, yellow, or brown, we've got to stick to our own latitudes, or pay the penalty, sooner or later." He went to the rail and bellowed his ultimatum through a megaphone. The canoes hovered, gathered together for a brief consultation, and finally obeyed him. The skipper wiped the sweat from his forehead in evident relief.

"Now you four get into the boat with your dead man," he ordered. "Billi-Boy, you take your regular crew. With Winchesters. Don't fire unless you are in bad danger. We'll cover

you from the ship. Row like blazes over to the point, but do it right. Don't let 'em think you're hurried, goin' or comin'. Jest put your beef into the strokes."

The point was much nearer to the schooner than the beach where the natives were now flocked, close to the huts of their village, in and out of which men were hurrying, like ants in disturbance. The boat was lowered on the port side, the action covered by the ship's hull until the rowers cleared the *Manuwai*.

Almost instantly the assemblage on the beach broke up. Most of them crowded into the canoes, while the rest started to run around the horn of the bay. And now Jim saw unmistakably the glint of the sun on spearheads and arrow points. The islanders had been temporarily outwitted and they were only too keen to find opportunity for active resentment.

"They'll try to cut off the boat, Jim," said the skipper, gray beneath his tan, leaning against the skylight in weakness, while his

whole body shook like an aspen leaf in the wind. "Don't fire until the last minute, but don't let the canoes get between us and the whaleboat, or Billi-Boy and the rest are gone coons." It was hard to understand him for his chattering teeth, and, had it not been for former experience, Jim could not have conceived a strong man so utterly stricken and yet capable of revival after the quinine got to work on his tissues. With a groan Captain Burr tried to pull himself together and then utterly collapsed, mind and body fettered by the alternate fits of high fever and low chills. Jim told two of the remaining sailors to get him to his bunk and return immediately on deck.

He was now in command, and the time was critical. The boat had landed its live passengers. Evidently they intended delaying the boat as much as possible, for Jim saw Billi-Boy jump ashore and thrust the muzzle of his rifle into their ribs, keeping them back, while two of the *Manuwai's* sailors put the body on the sands.

By now the canoes were coming up at a tremendous pace, spray spurting from the paddle strokes. A little behind the rest came a war canoe, a species of catamaran, two canoes joined together by a framework on which was erected a high platform with a deck-house thatched and walled with grass. There were outriggers on both sides, and the craft, under the impulse of two-score rowers, glided with great velocity, overtaking the earlier launched and smaller craft. On the platform, warriors brandished their spears and the sound of their shouting carried clearly over the water.

The fight was on. Tanavau had received its dead and was bent upon reprisal. A head for a life—two if they get them—heads of white men. Billi-Boy and his crew would count only for the larder, not as trophies. Jim found himself cool, and the skipper's words kept repeating themselves as a sort of text.

. . .

Don't worry, half the time they's nothin' to worry about and it wouldn't do any good if they was.

But there were things to consider, if not to worry over. The high deck of the double canoe, Jim figured, would come almost flush with the top of the barbed-wire fence along the rail. The warriors could easily jump down over and across the wire. That was one thing. The second was the strategy of the attack. All in all there were ten canoes, outside the catamaran. The savage fleet had divided, four to attack the *Manuwai* on the port, four on the starboard side, and two to intercept the boat, now coming back at top speed, with the ash oars bending and the water boiling about the blades. They would have to defend on all sides while the warriors from the war canoe would board at will. Unless they were stopped.

The two sailors who had taken the skipper below had come on deck again and caught up their rifles. Jim went with them and the fourth man to the stern rail, casting an anxious look at the tide. It seemed to be swirling less strongly along the sides of the schooner. Once

it changed to ebb, with enough strength to give him steerage way, he resolved to put out to sea. The wind had now dropped, but there were indications of a breeze from the land. Little catspaws ruffled the peacock-blue surface of the lagoon.

The boat was a hundred yards from the schooner. Two canoes, coming at a tangent, had less than fifty yards to go before they cut them off and formed a screen that would make firing hazardous from the risk of hitting friends.

Jim had never fired a shot in anger. He had seen one man killed. He recognized the necessity of stopping these canoes instantly. Billi-Boy and his men must get aboard in safety, and then all hands must hold off the savages until the tide turned and they got safely out to sea. That meant blood-spilling, probably death. But he did not think of the ethics. Captain Burr lay in his bunk, powerless for the time. The crew was under his charge. It was not only for himself he was going to fight,

not only for the crew of the *Manuwai* and its skipper, but for his race and to uphold the white man's traditions. These things did not come as actual thoughts, part of them were tradition and instinct, the rest rose subconsciously.

He grabbed a megaphone and yelled at Billi-Boy.

"Don't stop to shoot! We'll take care of them!"

The boat came on, sidling away a little from the canoes. Jim clipped down two up-raised sights on the *kanakas'* rifles. They had an unalterable idea that the raising of the sights had something to do with the firing of the pieces.

"Fire low," he told them, leveled his own rifle that wavered a bit, then steadied, and gently, steadily, squeezed the trigger. He had covered the shoulder of the bow paddler of the leading canoe in the hind notch of his sight. A paddle blade broke, shattered. The canoe swerved as the Bowman slumped forward and his paddle went adrift. The whale-boat shot by and swept up to the side of the

schooner with arrows in its planks and one sticking through Billi-Boy's loin-cloth.

"Never touch me, I jolly you," shouted Billi, as he slid through a gap in the barbed wire, followed by the crew, and jumped for his rifle. One man fastened the boat-painter to a cleat and closed the wire as the baffled canoes sheered off, sending a cloud of arrows at the schooner. They flew high, thumping through the canvas of the furled headsails and sticking in the masts.

"Tide, he slack," said Billi-Boy. "Plenty soon he turn. Wind too he come along *mauka* (mountain).

Jim saw wisps of cloud streaming through the gaps in the mountain-top. The catspaws had spread to a steady riffle that covered the lagoon. Already the schooner was swinging, the anchor-chain slackened, as the ship caught the between-tide eddies.

The war-canoe had been halted by strenuous back-strokes of its paddles. The others gathered about it. The yelling died down for

a moment. Then it was redoubled. The flotilla divided and swept down upon the schooner. But puff after puff of wind now struck the *Manuwai*.

Jim determined to risk the reef-gate.

"Get up the headsails, Billi-Boy!" he ordered. "Then the main! Stand by to knock the pin out of the shacklebolt!" They would have to sacrifice the anchor. There was no time to haul it in. Jim figured that they could take care of the men who tried to swarm over the barbed wire. The war canoe was the main danger. It was gliding along on the port quarter, as the crew under Billi jumped to their orders and the sails came up and filled to the breeze. The schooner chafed at her cable until the pin was sledged out, then she began to gather way and slip through the water, faster and faster.

"Take the wheel, Billi," shouted Jim. "I'll con you out."

It seemed to him that the mast was the honorable post. Whoever took it would be a fair

mark for arrows. Billi started to expostulate but Jim clipped him off with a brief "*Pau.*" And, as he issued his orders, he worked quickly. With a match he lit the tow-end the skipper had used for demonstrating the dynamite, from the soap-box he caught up half a dozen of the capped and fused half-sticks and shoved them in the bosom of his undershirt. He gripped the glowing tow in his teeth and jumped for the mainmast, sticking his naked, curling toes in the wooden rings and using the halyards, climbing like a streak while arrows whizzed by him. One passed fairly between him and the mast as he curved his body outwards in the clamber. He reached the throat of the gaff and bestrode it saddlewise. The topsails were still furled.

The schooner was heeling to the wind and racing fast towards the first angle of the gate. Jim shouted a direction down to Billi at the wheel, then blew his tow into redness and applied it to a sputtering fuse.

He whirled it about his head, deciding to cut

short the skipper's count to three, allowing for the distance. Arrows sidled by him, but the wind confused the shooters and he was still unscathed.

The sailors were shooting at the canoes which seemed waiting to make their final swoop until the catamaran was alongside. The mainsail was sheeted out to starboard, and Jim's aim was clear of the gaff. He flung the dynamite as he would have hurled a fireworks' squib, clearing the stays.

It lit fairly between the two hulls, under the platform and exploded. The *Manuwai* shuddered, and Billi sharply swung the wheel to keep the sails full. Jim saw upflung planks above a burst of orange flare, black figures flung headlong, shattered remnants of the war canoe tossing on troubled waters, and then bobbing heads that made for the nearest aid.

"Keep her up a bit," he shouted to Billi, for they were entering the channel at a lively gait. Then—"Stand by, below! Hard-a-lee! In-haul!" And they were reaching down the sec-

ond leg. Another shift of wheel and sheets and the *Manuwai* shot out to the open sea.

Jim took one last glimpse at the lagoon. There was no more thought of pursuit. The canoes were retrieving the warriors from the catamaran, who had escaped the explosion. The breeze strengthened, and Jim slid down to the deck.

"Stand out for a mile or so, Billi-Boy," he ordered. "Then make it nor'-east-by-nor' and hold it so!"

"Aye, aye, sir," sung out Billi with a cheerful grin. "What I tell you plenty trouble he walk along? I think plenty trouble back along there in Tanavau, I jolly you yes. Hi-yah, those black fella they jump all same flying-fish, when you throw um that devil-stick!"

"Any one hurt, Billi?"

"No. That Kaili, he speak one arrow he split um ear. Do him good. Too much blood that Kaili got. Get mad too plenty quick. Maybe better now."

Jim went below. Captain Burr tossed and

writhed in his bunk, but managed to open his eyes.

"At sea with a good breeze, sir," Jim reported. "No one hurt—except some of the blackbirds. I fed them dynamite."

The skipper was past talking for the time being, but he lay back quietly. Jim started to tip-toe on deck again, when the Admiral squawked suddenly,

*"Never say die, my boy! Never say die!"*

Jim stopped, scratched the bird's head and gave him a fragment of biscuit.

"I'll say that's a good motto, Admiral," he replied.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GRAVEN IMAGE

"Jim," said the skipper, as he scratched his beard and cocked his single eye towards his attentive listener, "there is a Science Shark up at the Plumaria Hotel, and I think we can do business with him. Trade's slack, and, unless you're specially anxious to get back to Lele Motu and your Uncle Dan'l, we might take up his proposition."

"What is a Science Shark, Captain Burr?" parried Jim.

"Wal, gen'ally speakin', Jim, I should de-scribe 'em, such as I have known of the species, as bug-catchers and bone-snatchers. Give 'em the shin of a *kanaka* king out of some old cave, and they can tell you the name of his tribe, the number of wives he had, what his name was, the language he talked and where

his people came from in the beginning. Same way with bugs. Show 'em a dead beetle or the empty shell of a land snail, and they'll write a book about it or talk your arm off, if you let 'em. If it wasn't for them, the museums 'ud go out of business and nobody 'ud ever know what a ring-tailed rithydinkus looked like before the flood.

"They're mostly bald and short-sighted, are these Science Sharks, and on board ship they're a blamed, botherin' nuisance. I had one on the *Manuwai* one time, an' I wouldn't repeat the dose for three times the money, which was ample. The schooner was filled up with things in bottles and things pinned on cork and things being skinned and cut up till I didn't know was I runnin' a ship, a morgue, or a drugstore. But this one is different. We won't take him along. I had a talk with him last night, an', though I didn't tell him I had what he wanted, I learned what he did want and I found out he was willin' to pay for it—liberal."

"What was it?" asked Jim.

"An idol. A graven image. They's lots of 'em kickin' about, but not the kind he wants. He—wait—they's a bit in the paper about him. You can read it, it's full of jaw-twisters."

He handed over the clipping from the Tahiti newspaper and Jim read it with interest.

Professor Elkhart Grimes, eminent philologist, has arrived in the Low Archipelago after a lengthy sojourn in Micronesia and Melanesia, where he has been endeavoring to secure links in the theory advanced by Deniker, Keane and Fornander that the Polynesian migration can be traced back to pre-Sanskritic times and assigned to the first or second centuries; that the Polynesians are a separate ethnic group, a branch of the Caucasie division of mankind, migrating from the Asiatic mainland in the Neolithic period.

Professor Grimes seeks especially to tie up this theory by a collection of images that, with their characteristic carvings, attitudes, placements and inscriptions, will make a chain from India across Malaysia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia to the monuments of Peru. In general, these images, or idols for, though Professor Grimes believes them originally to have been the statues of ancient leaders, indubitably many of them have been used for wor-

ship in latter years; are of the type found on Easter Island, those mysterious and mammoth figures that have no traditional history, but which Mr. Grimes hopes to identify by the establishment of his interesting theory.

The expedition has been financed by the Pan-American Philological Society, and vast sums have been expended so far. Professor Grimes expects to remain in the Society Group for some time, making Tahiti his headquarters, before he goes eastward to South America on the last lap of his journeyings. He is at the Hotel Plumaria. Yesterday he was in touch by cable with the curator of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. . . .

"I didn't read all of it, Jim," said the skipper. "Just enough to get interested. Can you understand it?"

"I think so. He means that the Polynesians are different from all other South-Sea Islanders and of a very ancient race that came from India or even Egypt."

"He's right, I reckon. The Hawaiians, Samoans, Tongans and Puamotu *kanakas* are different. Like the Maoris. Every one knows that. I could have said it without all

them jaw-twisters. Wal, the p'int is, he's hopin' to find an idol somewhere 'round the Societies, or the Marquesans, that looks like the images on Rapanui—that's Easter Island. He don't expect to find anything in the Paumotus, because they're all coral and it takes volcanic stone to cut the idols out of. Now, they don't say so in the paper, because they're glad to have the Professor stick around and spend his money, but the folks that thinks they know the groups best are laughin' at him, because they think they's no such stone gods this side of the Fijis. Little ones mebbe, small *tikiikis* and wooden ones, but not what he's after.

"I've been to Rapanui and I've seen them images of gray lava, all the way from four feet high to forty, all of 'em chucked off their pedestals on the big terraces where they used to stare out to sea. A British expedition took one of 'em once for the British Museum. Eight feet high it was and weighed four tons. They's stone houses there, too, a hundred foot long with painted pictures of birds an' beasts

an' figgers of squares an' circles an' triangles. Rocks along of the houses carved into faces, human an' animal an' devil. A rum place, Rapanui, Jim.

"But the funny thing about all the images is that the tops of the heads is all chiseled flat an' they used to have crowns fittin' the flat places, an' these crowns was of red stone, taken from a crater miles away from the quarry where they cut the gray stone for the images. I saw some of the crowns at the crater, all cut and ready for shipment to the terraces. One of them crowns, Jim, was ten foot across.

"Easter Island, as the paper calls it, Rapanui the natives call it, is twenty-four hundred miles east of Tahiti. Now the Professor has found the same sort of images in the Tongas and they're fifteen hundred west of here. He wants to close the gap. Figgers of the natives are the same race all the way, they must be that kind of an idol somewhere in the gap. He's right, Jim. There is. And I'm the only one knows where it is. This Grimes

is ready to put up a thousand dollars clear above all expenses to any one who'll deliver him a fair-sized image along his specifications, free-on-wharf at Tahiti. He might raise the ante a bit, at that. A thousand in the clear ain't to be sneezed at before we close up for the season. What d'ye say?"

"It looks good to me," said Jim. "Let's go."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ISLAND OF HUAREVA

On the morning of the day that they expected to fetch Huareva, according to the reckoning of the skipper, and of Jim, who was rapidly learning how to shoot the sun and work out his observations, the latter was on deck before dawn. He found the schooner sailing through a silver sea, reaching easily on a light breeze at six knots. He went forward into the bows and waited for the first sight of land-fall. This lifting of land out of the sea at the time and in the place where chronometers, sun angles and the figures of the "Nautical Almanac" determined was a never-ending delight to Jim. It seemed almost as if the land came up by magic after the saying of incantations.

The idea of magic was stronger than ever

this morning, as the first flush stole into the east and the silver sea reflected the rose and orange cloudlets like a crystal mirror. The sky deepened from pale lilac to turquoise, then to deeper sapphire, while the feathery cloudlets flamed and faded and a thimble-shaped mound of amethyst showed on the northern horizon.

Jim called the skipper, and they breakfasted on tea and golden-hearted *papaia* or tree-melon, on soft bread and freshly caught flying-fish, while the breeze strengthened and the *Manuwai* heeled to it, sliding faster and faster through the crisp water, as if eager to reach her destination.

"Huareva is a little kingdom of its own," said the skipper. "The king's name is Tetiopilo an' he weighs a pound for every day of the year, though he's a giant for skeleton and gets away with it. By rights, Huareva should belong to the Marquesans, but Tetiopilo's father led a pirating expedition on war canoes from Huareva among the Marquesans and carried off prit' nigh all the young an' pritty girls

for wives. Since then, the Huarevans ain't been popular with the Marquesans. Tetiopilo himself is nigh to sixty years old, and no one has ever dared to look cross-eyed at him, so that he's pritty used to havin' his own way. For a long time he didn't have any use for the white men, an' landin' on Huareva was almost as bad as landin' on Malaita in the Solomons—you could *land* all right but the job was to leave. Then the missionaries' schooner, the *Morning Star*, landed a missioner named David Thrum, and Thrum made a hit with Tetiopilo because he wasn't afraid of him and showed it.

"He pointed out to Tetiopilo his sinfulness and in six weeks he converted him from his evil ways, which included his extra wives, his drinking and his habit of eating his enemies or any stranger that happened his way. Converted all the island, too, though they say Tetiopilo took a hand in that end of it with a war-club, when Thrum wasn't lookin'. Anyway, when the *Morning Star* comes back for David Thrum, they find a church built down on the

beach and all the Huarevans singing *himinis* and dressed respectable. The idol's nose was out of joint and they let the jungle grow up and hide it. Old Tetiopilo took me to see it once up in the cliff temple jest to show me what a good Christian he was. Two hours after that I found out he'd watered his copra, to make it weigh heavier, but I suppose he has to back-slide once in a while. It's a hard job to change a sixty-year old cannibal into a meek and mild deacon. Anyway, that's how I came to see the idol and that's how I know they'll let it go cheap. A few dozen cans of salmon, twenty yards of cloth and some tobacco will fix that."

The skipper rose, fed the rest of the *papaia* to the Admiral and went on deck with Jim. They were close up to the island now. It looked not unlike a gigantic fern basket, clothed as it was with verdure from beach to tip-top summit, where a misty cloud hid the only bare crag. In the morning light the varying greens were wonderfully vivid, the shadows of the valleys purple and the whole of Huareva

seemed as if fresh-dipped in water, an isle of enchantment. Flocks of birds, bright as blossoms, rose and wheeled above the trees, the reef-surf purred and the flood-tide lipped the beach gently as the *Manuwai* made up to its moorings by the copra wharf and the anchor buried itself in the bottom sands of the still lagoon.

After the bustle of furling sail was over, Jim noticed the skipper peering perplexedly at the land, his one eye puckered. Jim looked too, and saw that the beach was deserted and that, save for the murmur of the surf and the chatter of the birds, the place was strangely silent.

Back of the wharf stood the copra sheds, and, a little way down the curving beach, he could see the grass roofs of the village and the corrugated iron roof of what should be the church, to judge from the conical steeple of thatch.

"It looks as if they'd all left," he said. The skipper nodded.

"'Tain't like the king not to be on hand," he declared. "'Course, it ain't tradin' season, an' he wouldn't be expectin' anybody. They may be all on the other side of the island on a grand fishin' trip. Give 'em the salutin' gun, Jim, an' see if we can't rouse some one up."

Jim slipped a blank cartridge into the breech of the little brass cannon and pulled the lanyard. There was a puff of white smoke, a flash and a report that roared back at them from the slope of the land, sending the birds flying high in indignation. Jim gave Huareva three cartridges, but failed to gain any recognition.

"It's rum," said the skipper. "See there, son, there's his copra lying beside the warehouse. It ain't even sacked yet. Something wrong here. Sickness, mebbe. I'll get my medicine chest an' we'll go ashore."

But there was not a sign of any inhabitant's presence. They went through the huts of the village and found them in order, with the mats in place, cooking utensils cleaned and put aside.

In the church the hymn books lay on the benches and the pulpit of hand-polished and carved *toa* wood was draped with a red cloth. It was a model village—without any villagers. A great pile of empty salmon cans were dumped in one place, nowhere was there any litter. But—there were no people.

"They can't *all* have gone off on a trip," argued the skipper. "Not all the women and kids, unless there was some sort of a plague. I've seen that happen an' an island left cleaned out of population and *kapu*. It's derned funny. The village looks as if they might have cleared out in a hurry, for they haven't taken a thing with 'em, but it ain't been very long ago by the looks of things. They was a bunch of bananas hangin' up in one of the huts an' the fruit ain't more than fairly ripe. You an' me'll go on a little exploration trip, Jim. They's good trails all over the island. If nobody's at home, we'll take along the idol an' leave pay for it. We'll have to lower it down from the cliff on the other side of the island. Water

comes up deep close to the land and the weather's just right for the job. We'll leave Billi-Boy aboard with four men and take the rest with ropes an' tackle. Billi can sail around while we're goin' overland. We'll rig up a spar and put the thing through. A converted king's got no use for an idol and a Christianized island is no place for a graven image."

It was a strange journey, Jim thought, up through the thick guava brush and then through the dense forests where high boughs met overhead and made all the way a green twilight, where ferns and creepers choked the growths and interlaced the trees, and great orchids swung like lighted lamps, while butterflies, gaudy as the flowers, flitted noiselessly ahead of them as they steadily mounted. Here and there shafts of sun struck through the heavy verdure, spattering the ground and gilding foliage and blossoms. Silence reigned. It was an island of silence. The birds had either fled at their approach or hovered too

high above the treetops for their voices to be heard.

Once Kaili, one of the native crew, stopped, with a warning palm set against their progress, and, his broad nostrils flattened, snuffed eagerly. To Jim the forest was a reek with the perfume of shrubs and flowers and the aroma of spicy growths, but the *kanaka* evidently sensed something else. For two or three minutes he stood with his head thrown back, frozen to a statue, while the rest of the party kept quiet and tried to hold their breaths.

"Man he walk along bush," said Kaili at last. "Two, five, ten, *plenty* man he walk along, I think thisaway."

He pointed and they stood still, looking down a tangled aisle of the forest. But there was no sound, and presently Kaili owned that he could no longer detect the smell. Jim noticed that the skipper did not pay very much attention.

"Can he really smell men in the bush?" he asked.

"Some of 'em claim to," said the skipper, "but I never saw them come through with it. I suppose all of us humans could smell once on a time, an' it stands to reason a *kanaka* should smell better than a white man. But I don't put over much stock in it. Kaili is like the rest of 'em. They're all too anxious to get in the limelight. Let's push on."

## CHAPTER XIII

### AT THE TEMPLE

The primeval, tropical growth closed in, thinned out and closed again, but now the sea wind began to manifest itself and Jim smelled the tang of the salt ocean with relief. The heavy odors of the jungle were sickly after awhile. The narrow path hacked out of the jungle, that they had been following, turned sharply and mounted a rise where they caught a glimpse of the ocean looking like grosgrain silk beneath them and the *Manuwai* tacking shorewards. The pitch was steep, but the trail was deeply worn and wide enough for two to walk abreast. Kaili got restless again, but the skipper led the way with Jim beside him. Both carried their automatics in holsters, but there seemed no cause to use them.

"The *heiau* (temple) is just ahead," said Captain Burr.

A nauseating whiff assailed Jim's nostrils. It was not unlike a concentration of the jungle-flowers, and it somehow suggested a charnel house where flesh and funeral blossoms alike have decayed. Five or six scarlet butterflies danced on a beam of light and lit upon a branch that was leafless, where they clung with wavering wings. The path led to a head-high fence of weathered wooden pickets, with here and there a tall post that had its top carved into a ghastly, hideous travesty of a face, with lolling tongue and shallow-gleaming eyes of pearl-shell. Either side of an entrance gateway towered two wooden images and all about the enclosure were others leering at the intruders, squat bodies carved out of wooden stakes whose pointed ends were driven in the hard packed earth. Some of them slanted drunkenly. The jungle had grown, since the god had been discarded, and gloomy cypresses bound with lianas crowded close to the fence,

leaving only one gap seaward, through which the light came and touched a gray and silent figure, majestic with a strange dignity, rudely suggested though the limbs and features were in the great block of gray lava. The face was sphinxlike, though the nose was long, the eyes slanting. The top of the head was flat, lacking a crown of red stone. The hands were on the knees, set close together. From the lap to the feet, where there was placed a troughlike stone, a dark suggestive stain showed where the blood of victims had trickled down from the bodies set on that awful lap.

A shed with a high-peaked roof of grass had been built about the god on three sides. On either side of the idol skulls were piled high in broken pyramids. Orchids swung down from the thatch and these were as scarlet as the butterflies Jim had noticed outside, scarlet as clots of blood, he thought. Despite the heat of the day, the place seemed cold, sepulchral, horrible with the remembrance of all the victims sacrificed to that grim image, testified to

by the piles of grinning skulls, the stains on the idol, and the sacrificial stone.

As Jim gazed at the god the enclosure seemed to darken until the radiant hue of the orchids faded. He looked up and saw the sky still blue beyond the tangle of the meeting boughs. But, seaward, the horizon was banded for some twenty degrees with a slate-colored cloud that showed a ragged and livid edge, swiftly climbing toward the zenith, urged by the wind. He caught sight, too, of the *Manuwai*, jibs down, only the staysail set, foresail close furled, two reefs in the main, beating out to sea. Billi-Boy had forestalled the sudden squall and was prepared to meet it with searoom for manœuvering. They would have to wait until the tropical storm was over before the schooner could work up again for the lowering of the stone god.

And that was not going to be an easy job, Jim thought, as he looked at the bulk of the thing, frowning down upon them as if ready to resent desecration. But the skipper took the

matter easily enough. He bade the native boys throw their ropes and blocks on the ground and walked round the temple enclosure to survey his ground.

"We'll skid his nibs along on cypress logs," he announced. "Have to take out a section of the fence. That big tree'll do for a boom. We'll put the lift-rope on to the schooner's winch—it ain't more'n a hundred foot down—an' we'll steady it from here with a guy. Now what in time is wrong with *you*?"

It was Kaili again, his brown face gray with fright, his eyes wide open and his nostrils agape.

"What I say—what I say along you?" he gasped. "Too plenty *much kanaka* walk along this place. Too *much . . . ! ! Yah!*"

Like so many great apes, the Huarevans dropped from the bows of the cypresses, falling from above, vaulting over the fence, a hundred of them, filling the little enclosure as suddenly as water from a pump will fill a trough. The skipper and Jim were pinioned before they

could get their automatics from their holsters and the native boys thrown violently to the ground. All this was done in comparative silence, with the grunts and gasps of wrestling men. Then, through the gate, there came two of the strangest figures Jim had ever seen.

First came Tetiopilo, king of Huareva, enormous, gross, the woolly hair above his three-chinned face stained orange by lime applications and frizzed out like the mane of a lion. About his fat neck he wore a necklace of human hair, from which pended a hooklike ornament made from whale ivory. The lower part of his distended stomach was tattooed, the decorations seemingly continued to his knees, partly hidden by a loin-cloth. Shell and fibre bracelets were pressing deep into the flesh of his forearms, brass rings tinkled on his puffy ankles. He carried a curved club of heavy wood, studded with shark's teeth, swinging it lightly. For all his flesh he held dignity, but his features were heavy and cruel. His black eyes held malignancy as he walked through his

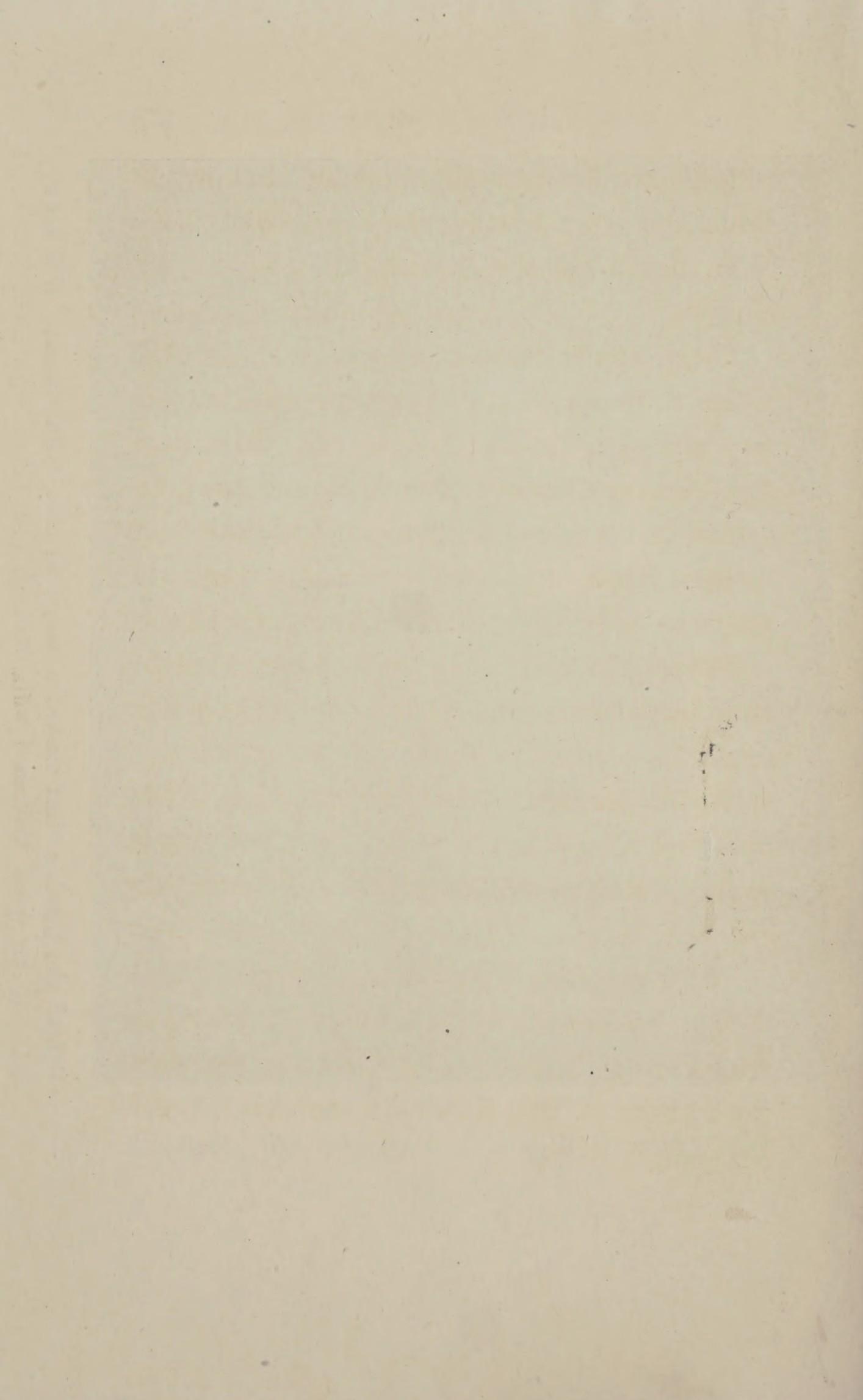
people who pressed aside a way for him, and gazed gloatingly at the captives.

Captain Burr returned his gaze steadily, and Jim attempted to follow the skipper's example. Behind the gigantic chief stalked a tall, lean man, with the face of a hawk, his frame bedizened with feathers, with bones, with teeth, with beards and tresses of human hair and with yard upon yard of brass wire wound around arms and legs, elbows to wrists and knees to ankles. Cockatoo plumes were in his fuzzy hair, one-half of his fierce face was daubed with yellow earth, the other with red. His body was smeared black and his ribs were picked out with white. He carried a gourd rattle in one hand, the other was clutched over the carved hilt of a *machete*, swung from a belt of shark-skin in a wooden sheath. As he came on, the crowd made room for him even more eagerly than for the king.

"A *kahuna* (wizard), Jim," said the skipper, in a whisper, as Tetiopoli turned away from them and the last comer stood before the idol



Behind the gigantic chief stalked a tall, lean man, with the face of a hawk, his frame bedizened with feathers, with bones, with teeth



with his arms outspread, one hand shaking the rattle, the other holding the now naked blade. "I'm afraid the king's backslid. We'll soon find out."

There was no question about that, Jim decided, thinking of the *Manuwai* working her way seaward against the squall. The dark cloud was well above them now and the tree-grown place was so gloomy that the men farthest from them seemed shadows and the red orchids were no longer distinguishable.

Tetiopilo came over to them again and stood laughing silently, his great body shaking like a jelly.

"What for you come along Huareva, Kaptani Burri?" he asked. "Too bad I think you come because one time you all same my friend."

"Why not your friend now, Tetiopilo?"

"No *papalangi* (white foreigner) friend of mine," said the king, and his face blackened with anger. "All *papalangi* too much cheat. No good."

"Davida Tarumi (Thrum) does not cheat, Tetiopilo," said Burr quietly.

The king made a violent gesture, evidently working himself into a rage.

"I tell you *papalangi* no good! Davida Tarumi he come and make plenty too much talk along *papalangi* god. He speak my god no good, his god much better. Much better I live the way he speak. Allaright. Me, I try thataway. I talk along my people—make them walk all same way Davida say. Not drink, not steal, not have more than one wife, not fight. *Yah!* All same Huareva men soon they all like women! Bimeby comes one *papalangi* trader. He speak he all same brother to Davida wife. I give him plenty shell, plenty pearl, plenty trepang, plenty turtle. Copra not dry or I give him copra. He give me *samani* (salmon). Allaright, we eat that *samani*. My word, I think we all die. I tell you too much plenty trouble walk around my belly, walk around bellies all my men. I think that man he try make us all *mäté*. Bimeby he

think he come back, get all copra for nothing.

"Kilo," the king turned to the hawk-faced, painted priest, "he speak along my god. My god he say he *too* much angry along this Davida Tarumi and this *papalangi* trader. He mad along us. He speak better we die. My word, everybody mighty sick. Kilo talk plenty hard to my god. God he say suppose he smell the blood one—two—*papalangi* men he fix everything. I tell Kilo we do this a-thing. *Eyah*—everybody rightaway get well—no one *mäté!* Allaright, your *motu* (ship) he come. We hide. Now we fix you so my god he know I speak straight along him. *Eyah!*"

The islanders echoed his last cry and Kilo, the wizard, advanced with gleaming, upraised knife. Jim, standing by the skipper, braced himself. Out of the black sky came mutterings of thunder. He wondered where the *Manuwai* was now, and whether Billi-Boy would know their fate? Whether it would be avenged? Whether the brother-in-law of David Thrum had known the salmon was bad

and would give Tetiopilo and his people ptomaine-poisoning?

"You are foolish, Tetiopilo," spoke the skipper's voice, steady and even. "You know the *papalangi* god is stronger than your god. Do not do this thing, or you will be sorry."

"Hai! What kind of talk is that? Your god stronger than my god! You think that so? Allaright. We try. Suppose your god so big, you speak along him, maybe he show how plenty strong he is. Hai! I give you one *mele* (chant) along time you try. Suppose you sing *himini*? Suppose you make talk along your god?"

He spoke to Kilo, the wizard, and the latter spoke to all the murderous crowd. Instantly all save the men holding Burr, Jim and the boys from the schooner squatted on their haunches and began to chant in a weird minor, very softly, a death chant, their eyes rolling towards the victims.

"You heard what he said, Jim," said the skipper. "Soon as that *mele*'s over they'll slit

our throats and stick us up on the lap of that graven image. I'm shy on eddication, Jim, an' I was never much of a hand to pray, but, son, we sure need a prayer now. Mebbe you could make shift to put up a talk—to Him." He jerked his head upwards to the black heavens. "I ain't no manner of right to ask Him for any favors, but you're a clean youngster and it don't seem as if He would let this thing go over, if He knew about it."

The darkness, the creaking of the cypress boughs in the rising wind, the dirge of the natives and the exultant eyes of Kilo worked on Jim's spirit. He tried to formulate a prayer, but the words would not come. His throat was parched, his lips sticky. As he spurred his mind for a form of supplication, again and again the words of the commandment came to him, while he gazed through the gloom at the idol in the shed, with the dark stain reaching from the knees to the altar stone.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.  
Thou shalt not make unto thyself a graven

image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I, thy God, am a jealous God. . . .

The chant ceased, the Huarevans sprang to their feet, the men grasping the captives tightened their grip and Kilo advanced, his blade upraised, the point upwards. It was the end!

Out of the black sky above shot down a sizzling, dazzling shaft of fire. Its lurid, lavender flame lit up the whole place, revealing the sinister face of the graven god. Then the bolt struck the lifted steel in Kilo's hand and fused it, jumping to the brass wire wound about his limbs, sending him to the ground before his shriek could leave his agonized lips. A crash of thunder followed hard—and there was the horrible smell of crisping flesh.

Another flare and Jim saw the face of Tetiopilo, awed, pop-eyed, his mouth agape, as he flung himself upon the ground amid his terror-stricken people and the charred remnant of

Kilo, the wizard. Jim felt himself released, saw the skipper step forward and heard him shout—

“The *papalangi* god has spoken, O Teti-opilo!”

At twilight the *Manuwai* sped south-and-west before a spanking breeze. In the hold was the graven image—no longer a god, but representing a thousand dollars as a museum curio and a link in the history of the Polynesian race. Aft, Huareva showed like a purple cloud on the horizon. The schooner was too far away for sounds to carry, but Jim knew that in the little church on the beach a thoroughly chastened monarch was conducting an impromptu but fervent service, consisting mostly of *himinis* from the collection left behind by David Thrum, South Sea missionary.

The storm had long since died away, the night was to be a starlight one. Already the first points of fire were breaking through the dome of heaven, and Jim, looking upwards,

quoted softly to the skipper the line that came into his head,

*He moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.*

"Son," said the skipper, "you said something."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WIDOW'S MITE

The *Manuwai* sailed serenely, leisurely, across a sea of blue and silver, sapphire in the shadows, silver-gilt in the myriad high-lights, where the ripples caught the sun. High above her masts planed a *mbelema*—a frigate-bird—on outstretched pinions, soaring lazily with wings banked against the gentle wind. Every little while flying-fish shot up between wind and water in graceful arcs, mailed in the colors of their element, azure and argent, like heralds of the deep.

It was mid-afternoon. Far, very far to the east, the plumed tops of the palms of one of the Matabai Islands showed, apparently stemless. It was lazy weather, and the schooner rolled a little as if dizzy with sleep. The *kanaka* crew was slumbering in the deck shadows, without exception; the Admiral had his bril-

lian head tucked beneath an emerald wing.

Jim Morse, at the wheel, was the only wide-awake person aboard, for Captain Burr, though he affected to talk and smoke as he lolled on the companion skylight, nodded now and then and emphasized every other nod with a prodigious yawn. His one eye was decidedly sleepy, Jim thought sympathetically, and hinted that the skipper might turn in, but Burr stoutly protested.

"No, sir, I won't. We got none too much time together, seein' as how yore Uncle Daniel has got his mind set on your goin' back to Lele Motu, though what in Time he needs you for through the rainy season, 'cept for company mebbe, I don't figger. Thet's selfish talk, seein' as that's the main reason I want ye. Of course he's your legal guardeen, but then yore my legal pardner an' part owner of the schooner.

"I'm goin' to have a long talk with yore Uncle Dan'l, Jim," he went on, "thet is, if you have no objection after we talk it over first.

The tradin' game is nigh played out at this end of the Pacific, 'specially since the war. New conditions, new big companies formin' with reg'lar steamer service an' big capital back of 'em. I ain't as young as I used to be, but I ain't outgrown a longin' of mine and a hunch of mine to cruise over Papua way, British New Guinea, and see what we can pick up. There's copra there and pearls and shell and trepang, same as they is here, but there's gold too, and birds-of-paradise in the d'Entrecasteaux—the gold's mainly in the Louisiades—there's ebony and sandalwood and a lot of wild rubber. I've kind of had my eye on thet rubber proposition for some time.

"Now, if yore uncle'll let you go, how about it, Jim? How about you an' me takin' the *Manuwai* an' tryin' our luck over thetaway?"

"It sounds fine to me," said Jim. And it did. Birds-of-paradise and gold, to say nothing of sandalwood and ebony and rubber, sounded like a fairy combination of romance and reality. Such sort of cargoes used to come to Tyre and

Sidon in the days when Solomon was building his temple and the Queen of Sheba peacocked it down the great hall. Sandalwood and gold and—or was it peacocks and apes and ivory that came to Tyre, he wondered, before he put his question.

“Any ivory in New Guinea, Captain Burr?”

“Never saw any, unless it might be alligator’s teeth; they’s ‘gators in ’most all the cricks an’ rivers.”

This sounded even better, yet Jim shook his head dolefully.

“Uncle Daniel won’t give his consent. I suppose I ought to have it, though I’m sixteen.”

“I may coax him over,” said the skipper, but he spoke noncommittally. Daniel Morse could, he knew, be cranky on occasions and it galled him a little to know that his nephew was taken up and into partnership by Burr, who had never offered him the privilege. That was why he had sent by mail to Tahiti, recalling Jim to Lele Motu before the rains commenced.

There was not much sign of rain in sky or sea at present, though the monsoon changes were due, and unsettled and stormy weather might be expected at any time.

The *Manuwai* sailed on closehauled to the light breeze. Captain Burr ceased to talk, his pipe went out, his one eye closed in sleep as he lolled, and a snore brought him to, all-standing, to look half apologetically at Jim before he announced his intention of taking forty or fifty winks. Jim kept his mind agitated with thoughts of New Guinea and arguments that might be brought to bear upon his Uncle Daniel. He was aware that Daniel Morse had hailed his nephew's arrival from California with a doubt in the welcome that only diminished when he found that Jim was capable of handling the natives on Lele Motu and doing most of the work that Morse had formerly accomplished. Jim had been willing enough, but his keen young brain saw very clearly that the leisure thus gained by his uncle was not doing the latter any good. The white man in

the tropics must ever keep his body and his physical cravings controlled by the will of an active brain, and Daniel Morse was not doing this. He slept most of his time, got careless of his habits, even his personal cleanliness, and he drank a great deal more than his limited energies could carry off. He was deteriorating, and, when a white man starts down grade in such latitudes, the return is difficult.

"There may be a beachcomber or so come back," once said Captain Burr, "but I never saw one that did, and I've seen a heap of sand bums in my day." So that Papua with vigorous, kindly Captain Burr was vastly more attractive to Jim than the prospect of Lele Motu with Daniel Morse, relation or no relation.

Still day-dreaming, he became conscious of an odor coming on the breeze, that aroused early recollections. At first he could not place these; he was only aware that the smell was far from being the spicy scent of bush flowers and sweet-leaved growths. The reek of it filled his nostrils and actually seemed to clog

them. It stuck to the roof of his mouth, nauseating, persistent, strengthening and lessening in degree with the puffs of wind. Jim wrinkled nose and lips and envied the sleeping *kanakas* and the skipper; he envied the Admiral, and he remembered a story of the man on a survey party who awoke in a cabin to find himself the only man awake and a scared skunk under his bunk.

"Just my luck," said Jim whimsically and half aloud. "It smells like the fish-glue factory in South San Francisco. I bet it's a dead whale to windward, between us and the islands. Gee, I wonder if we'll find any ambergris? There ought to be some reward for standing this stink. And we're heading right up for it, too."

It was quite a temptation to awaken somebody to share his misery, but Jim stuck it out until the parrot stirred, unreefed his head from a wing and cocked a bright, protesting and accusing eye on Jim, as one who might be considered responsible for the offense that had en-

tered his brain by way of his nostrils. Suddenly the bird stretched, flapped its clipped wings and shrieked.

*"Look out, look out, ye lubbers, the galley's caught afire!"*

Jim laughed at the Admiral's aptness, provoked by some ancient association, and the skipper came on deck, alert, snuffing.

"Some one rotting-out," he said.

Jim knew what he meant, the custom of allowing pearl shells to rot in the sun so that the meat could be stripped easily by washing from the mother-of-pearl nacre of the inner shells, for the ready location of what actual pearls might be present. It was his first actual experience of contact with the operation.

"I thought it was a dead whale," he said.

"Dead whale? A dead whale is Otter of Roses compared with rotting shell," said the skipper. "If the breeze was steadier, you'd know what I mean. We'll sheer off a bit, Jim, and get to wind'ard of the stink soon as we can. I wonder who's pearling on the Mata-

bais?" He looked over the rail to where the palm tops showed in two wide apart clusters, with their stems now attached and plainly visible, seeming to be wading through the sea to meet the schooner.

"The one to stabboard is Tiatau," said the skipper. "Judson quit there two season ago. Cleaned out the lagoon. No one but a crazy man'd tackle Tiatau for three to five years from now. It's a cinch that Judson didn't leave any gleanin's. The one to port is Tiau, Jean Lafarge's holding. 'Course it might come from Tauiti, but that's ten mile off— By Ginger . . . !"

He swung on Jim and his one orb was filled with a light, that, coupled with the set of his features, the tilt of his jaws beneath his beard, Jim recognized as meaning some sort of action.

"We'll head off, so's to come down wind to Tiau," he said. "Breeze is freshenin' a bit. I'm goin' to hold up for a while afore we tack, so's to make certain. I'll take the wheel a spell."

"Certain of what?" ventured Jim, after he had watched the skipper's grim features for a while, wondering what had brought about the change. Captain Burr seemed to have come back to the deck of the *Manuwai* from a long way off, the grip of his gnarled hands on the spokes relaxed but his face was still stern as he spoke.

"Wal, I'll tell ye, Jim. I think some one's rottin' shell out on Tiau. Pritty soon I'll be certain. If they are, you an' me's goin' to hold way up to wind'ard, as I said, an' come down on Tiau from the west. I know the place, and they ain't goin' to be liable to see us. The island slopes up like a wedge of cheese lyin' on its side with steep cliffs to the west. It's a nasty landin' there, but we can make it in the boat.

"Now, Tiau belongs to Jean Lafarge. He bought it from Old King Tamatau, and the French Government recognized the sale an' deed as O. K. an' proper. Jean found pearls on it from the start, an' it looked, one way and

another, as if he was goin' to be lucky. For one thing, he marries pretty Lucy Lenoir over on Mitabele, and the two goes to live on Tiau. Then the war comes along an' Jean he's no more fiery to go and fight for France than Lucy is to have him go. So he goes and he never comes back. Lucy gets a letter and one of them war crosses, and, after a while, she went back with her little kiddy to live with Pierre Lenoir on Mitabele. She's there yet. I know that for certain. Pierre Lenoir he's old and he ain't over lucky and they're sailin' pritty close to the line an' poorly victualed.

"It may be that someone authorized by Lucy is working the lagoon on Tiau for Lafarge's widow. Mebbe they ain't authorized. Knowin' what I do about the gen'ral circumstances, I figger they ain't. Anyway we'll take a look-see. An', if they's someone poaching, I figger you an' me ain't goin' to sail by an' watch the widow and kiddy of a man, who died tryin' to haul his lieutenant out of a shell-hole, robbed blind. I was too old to do my bit and

you was too young, but mebbe here's our chance after the war's all over. How about it, Jim?"

Jim's eyes were shining and a little moist. He didn't have to answer audibly. The skipper nodded and went on,

"They call me a one-eyed old pirate once in a while," he said. "In the old days, when it was a free race down to any pearl prospect, when rules was scarce and government supervision scarcer, I took my chances with the rest of 'em. Pearl poachers, they used to call us, but, if we poached, it was agin' the government. You never knew for sure jest what government it was, anyway. But a poacher who'd steal a widow's mite like this, the widow of a fightin' man like Lafarge, is a derned sea-skunk and he ought to be strung up to a cocoapalm. They's men hangin' around Tahiti who'd do it though, as we know. They may be in force, and they'll put up a fight, if they suspect us of nosin' in. Jest the same, we'll do a little spyin' in the enemy's trenches. The

smell's from Tiau all right. We'll land, and I'll spin a yarn about bein' jest in from my tradin' cruise an' needin' fresh water. We'll lower the tanks in case they take us up. Main thing is to see who they are. You an' me'll split the scoutin' party. I'll do the palavering, if we run into any of 'em, as we're bound to do, I reckon, an' you can snoop around and take a mind photograph of the rest. If they're poachin', they're prob'ly doin' it on their own, without *kanakas*. Prob'ly five or six whites. *Kanakas* are apt to talk too much.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE PEARL POACHERS

Captain Burr let the schooner fall off until the still strengthening breeze came abaft the beam, and they went reaching off to the westward until the palms of Tiau were almost out of sight. Then they tacked and came criss-crossing back. As the skipper had said, the western cliffs of Tiau rose high and steep without sign of barrier reef, the breakers spouting at the base of the laval walls. The whaleboat was lowered and they rowed cautiously in to land the skipper and Jim in a tiny cove where they were forced to jump ashore to slippery rocks, as a wave lifted, and then climb up a rift in the cliffs towards the top. The schooner hung off and on in a limited sentry-go and the whaleboat waited for them as, armed with hidden automatics, they made their way to the summit. The cliffs them-

selves were bare of any growth, but from the top to the eastern rim, the land was bush covered, big trees thrusting up through the under-growth, with here and there a grove of coco-palms lightening the greenery.

Jim saw how good was the skipper's simile of "a wedge of cheese lying on its side." The cliffs formed the high, outer rind of the wedge and the ground sloped down to the beach gradually. The cheese had been deeply bitten into by the lagoon that lay green as an emerald beneath them, barred off from the blue depths by a line of creaming surf. They were to windward of the smell now and it did not bother them. Captain Burr gazed carefully down, scanning particularly the lonely stretch of lagoon.

"Shell's on the beach," he said. "They must have cleaned the lagoon nigh out, and now they're waitin' for the stuff to rot before they make a clean up. Meantime, they're loafin' 'round drinking or playin' poker for their shares, or what they've already picked out of

thet mess. Probability is they've made two or three jobs of the shell, their kind ain't content to wait too long before they see what they've got. They wouldn't want to waste work, which they jest natcherally hate, on a lot of shell thet wasn't rich, or didn't make a showin' from the start. They figger they ain't likely to be disturbed, seein' thet Judson ain't on his holding. But they forgot the far-reaching of that stench.

"There's poor Lafarge's hut, down there, in a clearin' you can't see from here. His wife made quite a garden there. You can see the smoke, if you look close."

Jim saw a thread of whitish gray smoke, like a strand of gray wool, showing by some cocoa-palms. Then the two struck into the bush, striking a little-used trail after a bit and traveling rapidly downwards. At last they came to the edge of the clearing, sadly neglected and overgrown with the still neat-looking little grass-thatched bungalow in the center.

The smoke came out of a stove-pipe thrust

through the roof of a lean-to kitchen. They caught glimpses of some one busy in the shed, the walls of which were made of palm-thatch sadly in need of repair.

"I'm goin' to work my way round in front," said Captain Burr. "We want to get a good line on these chaps. Too many odds against fightin' 'em, and we can't prove positive they ain't got a *lessee's* right, till we get back in touch with Lafarge's widow. They're layin' up in the house, an' we might stick around twenty-four hours before they came out. Jim, you mosey through that garden and see who you can spot round the back. Be prepared to swear to 'em in case, if we find out they're crooked and they've *vamosed* before we get back with the Commissioner, we can identify 'em when they show up at Tahiti to make a sale. Thet's where they're sure to land—almost certain, that is. You keep in that tangle of sugar-cane, and you can get close up. Then you work your way back to'ards the boat. I'll be comin' right along."

It seemed a mite hazardous to Jim, but he knew that the skipper did not plan lightly and knew far more of human nature as exemplified by such characters than he did. He watched the captain, snake quietly off, for all his bulk, to make the circuit of the clearing, and crept himself through the sharp-bladed, rank cane.

Just as he worked to within twenty feet of the lean-to, he saw the man who was acting as cook make an inspection of a pot on the stove, close down its lid and go through a door into the main house. Swiftly, he darted across the space and stood close to the boards of the house, edging up to a window that was open with its sill about the level of his shoulder. He heard the mingling voices of several men, a rough lot, to judge by their accent and mischoice of words. One voice struck him as slightly familiar.

"When's thet stew goin' to be ready, Jake?" asked one.

"'Bout thirty minnits. Who's bin playin' my hand?"

"No one. 'T won't do you no good to sit down, Jake, Jerry's got all the luck. He's won prit nigh ev'ry pearl, seed an' *baroque* in the outfit."

"There's more in the beach pile," said another. "We sure struck a rich patch this trip."

"Heap of good it does us, when Jerry here corrals it all."

"I won it fair, didn't I? It warn't me proposed cards ennyway. Hey, they's some one outside . . .!"

Jim could hear the scrape of seats set back and the scuff of feet on the floor. Then the skipper's voice hailing,

"Shack ahoy! Any one to home? My water tanks are low. Like to get some fresh water and drinkin' nuts from you fellows."

Quite audibly, the men in the room were crowding towards the entrance. Jim told by the access of light in the open window above him that a door had been opened. He inched up and peered over the sill. All the men had their backs to him, and, without exception,

they were going out of the door. One turned his face sideways for a moment, as he shifted a pistol holster from buttock to hip, and Jim caught in his breath. As he recognized the voice, now he remembered the face. It was one of the gang that had kidnapped him and tried to get the position of the Miter Island and the wreck of the lost galleon from him. He knew that the gang had been chased by the Commissioner's fast launch and had run their sloop ashore and scattered in the bush of an island whence only three were captured. The man had been called Jerry, he recollects that, and he knew that these men were not apt to be *lessees* of this island and the hero Laffarge's pearl patch. Besides, they had reached for their guns as men whose consciences were uneasy at surprise.

Jerry did not see him. He was the last out and he shut the door behind him. The reason for that move was plain to Jim's eyes.

A rough table was littered with cards, with poker chips, with squarefaced bottles and

chipped cups and glasses, but there was one place where shone a pile of softly gleaming gems, a small fortune in pearls, even to Jim's unexpert eyes. These were the stakes that Jerry had won, the pearls from Lafarge's patch, the widow's mite, belonging to her and to the "kiddy." For lack of these the widow, her child and father were "sailin' close to the wind and short on victualing." With the hope of pearls like these in his dulling brain, Lafarge might have died the more easily, thinking his family provided for.

Jim clutched the sill, pulled himself up, hitched a leg across the sill and was in the room, hardly conscious of thought in the action. Gun in one hand, stealing softly in his sneaker shoes across the floor, he gathered up the iridescent heap and transferred them to the breast pocket of his shirt. Then he slipped out of the window and to the ground again, ready to help to cover the skipper, if Jerry should recognize him and resent and guess the reason for his presence.

But he was too late. The skipper's one eye had betrayed him.

"Water?" cried Jerry. "I wouldn't give you a drop of water, if you was burnin' in hell-fire! You git—"

There was a bit of a scuffle, and Jim darted into the bush for the front. Some vines twisted about him and held him for an instant. Then he knew that the skipper was still unharmed.

"Why, shiver my garboard strake, if it ain't one of the quinine hunters!" said Captain Burr. The rest guffawed, swift to laugh at the comrade who had won their shares. The papers' account of Jim's quick-wittedness at turning the tables on the kidnappers had made the affair a standing jest in the Lower Archipelago.

"I sure wouldn't have asked you for water if I'd known who was here," went on the skipper, jovially enough. "And I ain't needin' any more quinine than I got aboard my schooner."

I reckon I can get along, folks, though I'm just in from my long cruise."

"You let go of me," snarled Jerry. Jim peered through the thick leaves, disentangling himself from the vines, his automatic covering the group. Two of the men grasped the furious Jerry, whose coarse face was purple with rage, preventing him from drawing his gun. "Let go of me, and I'll fill him full of lead, the spyin' hound!"

"Now don't you go to shootin'," said the skipper easily. "For two can play at that game, and I ain't often known to miss, my one eye bein' special trained for pistol-work. Besides, my schooner's right handy, and, if I didn't show up, there might be a whole peck of trouble turned loose. As I said, if I'd known my druggist friend was here I wouldn't have dropped in. As it is, I'll bid you all good day."

He backed off slowly towards the bush, the men still restraining Jerry. There were five

of them all told, a villainous looking crew, all with guns at their belts though they were alone on the island and had not anticipated callers of any sort. Four of them seemed relieved to get rid of the skipper so easily. Only Jerry continued to curse and struggle. He broke loose, as the captain took the thick bush, and fired a shot. Jim's own pistol spat and the bullet hit Jerry's forearm. He dropped his weapon and clasped at his wound, the blood spreading through his fingers.

"Served you derned well right," said one of the men, callously. "You had no call to shoot at him. Want to queer the whole deal?" It was apparent that Jerry was none too well-liked by his fellows, apparent also that they figured that the shot had come from the rapidly dodging skipper, who now joined Jim and broke with him through the cane back to the trail by which they had come.

"A bad lot, and we're lucky to get clear," he said, as they hurried along. "I'll know them again. Did you spot your man?"

"The one in the kitchen? Yes," said Jim. "Also Quinine Jerry. And I hooked all the pearls on the table."

The skipper stopped.

"You did? Then here's where we double our speed. They'll take Jerry Quinine back into the house and they'll be after us. They'll take one look for our schooner outside the lagoon, and then they'll tumble and they'll be after us like a shark after mullet. Come on."

A shout proved the truth of his reasoning. It was followed by another. Jim and the skipper raced along the trail. Jim could have gone faster with his handicap of youth and lightness, but the pace began to lag as the sweating, panting skipper labored up the steep slope. Once they paused while Captain Burr stood trying to get his second wind.

"I ain't as young as I used to be, Jim," he smiled, with his face awry. "Got a stitch in my side. Better now. Come on."

They got to the end of the trail and clambered towards the rift. A shout showed that

they were sighted and there was the crack of a gun and the warning buzz of a bullet above and between them.

"Thet's a rifle," said the skipper. "But we've beat 'em to it."

They plunged down the declivity, careless of their going, hailing the waiting whaleboat that rowed in to meet them. A wave lifted and the skipper lunged off the rock, landing lightly enough on the bottom-boards and grasping the steering oar as Jim leaped down beside him.

"Put your backs into it," cried Captain Burr.  
"Pull the linings out of you!"

The oars bent to the sturdy strokes and the whaleboat shot off for the schooner that hung in the wind, awaiting them. The skipper's bare head smoked from the heat his race had engendered, but, like Jim, he was exultant. Jim, looking backwards, saw two figures appear on the cliffs. Another joined them. One knelt, aiming carefully. The rifle cracked, and the skipper gave a groan and slumped forward, releasing the steering-oar.

Jim caught it before it went overside. They were close up to the schooner now, and Jim called to the *kanakas* to row around to the farther side, sheltered from the fire. Another bullet had come skimming the sea, perilously close.

The skipper straightened up. His tanned face was pale, but his eye was still bright.

"Through the back, high up," he said. "Think it's gone plumb through the shoulder-blade. Might have touched the top of the lung. Nothin' serious, Jim. A lay up'll cure it before we make Tahiti. And we got the pearls."

They got him aboard and in his bunk, the schooner coming about and heading north for Tahiti. Jim was relieved to see the skipper rally after he had had a little whiskey. The bullet had taken a strange course. The bone had deflected its downward course and it had come out just above his right collar bone.

"You take charge, Jim," he said. "You know the course, nor'-east by east, straight as

you can sail. Get out the chart. There's a shoal I marked there last season. It's a new one, not down on the reg'lar charts. Submarine shock chucked it to the surface, I fancy, for I've sailed clean over the place heaps of times. Better give it a wide berth. It's about twelve miles from here, fetch it in about two hours, 'long to'ards dark. And don't worry none about me. The bullet's out, and I've weathered worse squalls than this. Bless ye, Jim, I'm tattooed with souvenirs. Rest is what I need till we fetch alongside the wharf. Then I'll have the doc' fix me up. Let me look at the pearls."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A STERN CHASE

Jim went on deck. The sun was slanting down fast in the west. The island showed up sharp against the sky. He knew little of surgery, but the skipper's color had come back and he did not feel much real alarm. The shot was high up, and Captain Burr was tough.

He laughed as he heard the Admiral, sensing some trouble, yell,

*“Never say die, my bully boy. Never say die!”* And he felt still better as he heard the skipper's low laugh in answer.

Then a call from one of the crew made him look aft. Stealing out from behind the island came a sloop. Jim frowned as he saw how fast it sailed, and, semi-professional as he was, noted the fine lines of the vessel and its big spread of mainsail. The boom was well over

the stern, the boat was heeling to the wind and about the bows showed spurts of spray. There was no question but what she sailed faster than the *Manuwai* for all the latter's superior spread of canvas. The *Manuwai* needed overhauling and a scraping. The swift-growing tropical growths on her keel made her drag behind her best speed. Captain Burr had planned to have her out on the marine railroad at Tahiti after the season closed and leave her in fresh water during the rainy months.

Jim decided not to call the skipper. To keep him on his back in the bunk was the best thing now that the wound had been washed and bandaged and the bleeding had stopped. He looked at the sun again. It was barely two hours to the brief tropic twilight, and then night. There was no moon. While they had been on the island, the wind had shifted and changed both in force and quality. It brought now a promise of wet weather and clouds were already gathering in scudding squadrons. It would be a dark night.

The sloop came up fast. Jim figured it was sailing three knots to their two, or even better than that. Once within rifle shot, the men, now desperate at the loss of their pearls and the prospect of being hunted down as poachers under the lately revised laws, severe in penalties, would fire and that they could aim straight Jim was very sure.

Two hours to twilight. *The reef!* The submarine quake shoal! He had marked it on the chart, dead ahead on their course. If . . .?

Within a few minutes he had the schooner's handyman, Billi, working on a triangle of light spars attached to a raft of heavier timber, a lantern slung from the tripod.

Clouds were all over the sky now, and the sun was sinking in a glory of purple, crimson and orange. Light had faded from the pursuing sloop's sail, and it showed dark, ominous as a shark's fin, gaining—gaining. The darkness sifted down ahead of time and Jim slipped below. A few drops of rain fell. He lit the

lamp in the main cabin, then lowered it, seeing the skipper peacefully asleep in his own tiny stateroom bunk. Then he went aft to where the traderoom had been built with the stern windows to light it and there he also lit a lamp.

"If only they don't think we're too easy," he thought. "But they know the skipper's wounded and they'll figure on me not remembering the light. Anyway, it's a chance and it'll give us another chance to give them the slip in the dark."

It was practically dark, when he went on deck again. Billi pointed out the sloop, so close Jim wondered why they did not fire, though in that light a hit on a man would have been almost a miracle. But it was a long way to Tahiti, and, if the sloop was still in sight of them by dawn, the next day could see them easily overhauled.

He sent a boy into the bows to cast the lead. It shot down repeatedly to twenty fathoms without trouble, but Jim knew they must be close up to the shoal. He had the whale-boat

launched, the improvised buoy set into it, a line attached, with the boat's painter, ready to cast off, hitched to a cleat.

It was quite black now, save for the streaks of phosphorescence in the water, and Jim, with four rowers, prepared to get into the boat. First, Jim took a glimpse through the night glasses and saw the sloop still coming on churning through the seas that were getting short and vicious. He called Billi, who was to steer, to light the lantern hanging from the tripod and covered it with the coat that he flung down. He went below and extinguished all the lights with one quick peek in to where the skipper still rested quietly. The Admiral muttered something drowsily as Jim hurried on deck and called to Billi to take the screen from the lantern and place the tripod and raft in the water.

He gave explicit instructions to the man at the wheel. He was to steer due west, keeping a close course and steering well up. After one round of the clock he was to come about

and retrace the tack. After two hours to run a light up to the main truck. Two hours, Jim figured, should see success or failure. Either he could find the shoal and decoy the sloop on its jagged points or the sloop would keep its course without noting the schooner's change. At least he hoped for one of these two events to happen. The risk was that the sloop might see their manœuver through the binoculars, but the spattering rain, that commenced to fall as they left the schooner and rowed off towards the mid-ocean reef, reduced that to a minimum. They towed the raft, and Jim kept them at a good stroke. He could see nothing of the sloop, now, through the rain. But he felt sure they could see his light, dancing along gallantly like a will-o'-the-wisp.

Captain Burr woke up with a very stiff shoulder and a very dry throat. He called for Jim, and the Admiral answered him,

*"Never say die, bully boy, never say die."*

"No one's saying 'die,' you son of a sea-

swab," roared the skipper. Outside of his shoulder and throat he was feeling fit. "Oh, Jim!"

His door opened and Jim appeared, looking very clear-eyed, flushed beneath his tan.

"I slept like the dead," said the skipper, "but I waked up alive. Have we got a cool nut aboard, Jim?"

Billi brought the nut, and the skipper drained the natural cup of its refreshing contents before he asked about the weather, the course and the log record.

"You sure made a good haul for the Widow Lafarge, Jim," he said. "I only hope those hounds don't tumble and clean up the rest of the shell in a hurry. They'll know we're after them now."

"I don't know if we'll get them," said Jim, "but I've a notion we'll get the pearls."

The skipper looked at his dancing eyes knowingly.

"What's in the wind now?" he asked.  
"You've been up to something!"

And Jim told him.

"We must have been within a mile of the shoal," he said. "The sloop was close up, trailing the light and we had to pull hard. I was in the bows of the whaleboat throwing the lead and pretty soon I got bottom at ten fathom, then five and I knew we were over a part of the shoal. Then it shallowed to two and the oars churned up seafire all about us. If it hadn't been raining, the sloop might have caught on. But there was our light going ahead and they were catching up fast. We kept on till we were in a fathom and the breakers were beginning to make. Then I tied on the whaleboat's kedge to our booby trap and anchored the light. We rowed off to one side and on came the sloop. I could see the glow of her skylight on her sail. She ran on hard, rising and shivering with the sail flapping, all aback, bows lifting. We could hear them running about and cursing. They lowered sail, but they were fast, with the sea making.

"We rowed around for a while, and, pres-

ently, saw the light in the maintop of the schooner. The sloop had taken a slant to one side. There was a nasty squall all night and we had to reef. That's all."

"All!" said the skipper. "*All?* And all's enough. Wait till I tell the Widow Lafarge that's '*all*' you did.

"Son, I'm proud of you! You took a risk, rowing off in the dark like that, but that's what makes a man, the risks he takes, not the safeties he plays. Soon's we get to Tahiti, and before they patch me up, we'll send the government folk out after Jerry Quinine and Company, or what's left of 'em on that shoal, an' you an' me 'll go back and clean up the rest of the widow's mite. I've got a hunch she can use it."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE *MANUWAI* STRIKES A GALE

Captain Burr's face was grave as he watched the barometer in the cabin of the *Manuwai*. The mercury was going through the performance known to navigators as "pumping," with fluctuations back and forth of a twentieth of a degree. The skipper carried both mercurial and aneroid instruments, the first to correct the latter by comparison. And the pointer of the aneroid was decidedly tremulous, as if registering the variations of an uncertain and feverish pulse, represented by the atmospheric pressure.

Jim watched him, thinking that even human senses were capable of noting the unusual conditions of the air. It was warm, muggy, heavy and without motion. The sea reflected the general mood of the weather. The waves

moved sluggishly, lacking all aeration, with dulled crests, seeming to crawl rather than, as usual, to be instinct with life. It was the color of over-used dishwater, only more greasy, so that Jim almost expected it to leave a line of scum along the schooner's run.

They floated in a dead calm under a sky that had a brassy tinge and was largely depleted of visibility, furnishing a gray twilight that, although it was close to noon, made a lamp in the cabin both cheerful and necessary. The dome of the heavens appeared to have lowered. To Jim's quick imagination it suggested the concave side of a vast bowl of metal with one bossy spot, slightly burnished, where the sun struggled to assert itself. Breathing was laborious work, the lungs seemed incapable of getting enough oxygen to drive the body's engines. The whole atmosphere made for inertia, for mental depression. The *kanakas* showed this most plainly, gathered in a mute group, save for Billi at the useless wheel, their eyes rolling uneasily to sea and sky, itchy with

the prickly warmth, convinced that the gods were angry and that catastrophe was imminent.

Even the Admiral resented conditions, alternately moping or fiercely plucking at an aggravating feather, perhaps wishing, in his parrot's mind, that he had been born without plumage or could dispense with it on such occasion, like a cloak.

"A Joshua Humdinger of a gale brewin', Jim," said the skipper, turning away from his barometer inspection. "It's goin' to blow hard enough before sundown to skin a flyin'-fish—a hundred miles an' better. I ain't worryin' so much about us. We've got plenty of sea room and the *Manuwai* has bucked some hard blows before this. She's built right, is our schooner. I attended to that. Went up to 'Frisco myself to Butler's yard and picked every oak knee and rib that went in her, before I sailed her down to Tahiti. She ain't spoonbowed or overhung at the stern, but she's staunch. We'll hang to it with a sea-anchor long's we can, and then we'll jest natcherally

scud before it, like a scootin' duck with Number Twelve shot trimming his tail feathers."

"How long before it breaks, Captain?" asked Jim. "And you said you weren't worrying so much about *us*. But you are worrying about something. What is it?"

"Thet's two questions to once, Jim. As for the first, they's no tellin'. We'll git one warnin'. Thet 'll be the advance scout of the storm, comin' from any which quarter. Wind —mebbe rain. Then nothin'—practically a vacuum. Then, a blow that would have made the whale seasick, let alone Jonah. We'll go on deck and git ready. Strip down and rig the sea-anchor. Question the second's easy answered. Who's a sailor always sorry for in a storm? Why, the folks ashore with no place to run before the wind."

As he followed the skipper on deck, Jim felt that the latter had somehow evaded his question. But there was plenty to do. It was darker. A sooty veil of brown was lifting all around the rim of the sea. And, out of the

vault of that metallic sky, there sounded a low but distinct moaning, exactly like the sound that comes from the hollow of a shell. The skipper noticed him listening.

"Tryin' to make up its mind where to start in," he said. "When it's decided, you'll hear from it again. We got to get all the canvas close-reefed and under double-gaskets, Jim. Suppose you boss thet job, while I get after the sea-anchor. We'll get a storm-jib an' a storm trysail ready to set, if we get a chance to use 'em. Double-lash the boats, Jim, an' we'll gen'ally clear the decks for action."

For many minutes the schooner bubbled with activity, and then all was done that could be done and still the storm menaced and did not strike. The skipper went below for a look at his barometers. Jim realized the loneliness of the scene, the bare masts, the reduced horizon, the sea without break or play or spout of fish, a rare occurrence in such waters, not a wing in the heavy air. Fish and birds had gone somewhere to cover.

Suddenly, wind blew out of nowhere, struck the schooner a slanting blow on her starboard bow that set her aback like a balky horse, shrilled through the standing rigging with a flurry of rain and was gone again.

"Warnin'," said the skipper. "Now we're fairly certain which way it'll strike and it suits us to a T. It'll drive us on our course, an' nothin' but deep water between us and Lele Motu."

His voice sounded unusually clear. As he lit a match for his pipe, Jim saw the little flame unwavering, straight and still till the skipper's breath sucked it down into the bowl, as if it had been a painted scrap of wood.

"Last chance to smoke on deck for a while," said the captain. "Ah!"

Out of the southeast where the Trade is born, so often fickle in the Lower Archipelago, came a low sigh that mounted to a roar like the blast that rises and grows in a steam whistle. Only a hundred times greater. Captain Burr pointed to where a line of dirty white came rac-

ing towards them. Jim watched the fierce wind whip the sullen, logy waves into yeasty pyramids, spindrift flecked his cheek as they hove overboard the sea-anchor, a stoutly-lashed-together arrangement like a floating platform and fended it off from the first onset of the seas, running ahead of the wind and threatening to use the anchor as a battering ram.

Then the wind hit the schooner, shrieking through the rigging, bowing the topmasts like whips, driving booming, drumming seas at her bows, as, indignant, she sprang back to the full length of the anchor cable and headed to the storm. Spume blew in horizontal lines, sight was wiped out and hearing, speech, impossible. The deck remained fairly steady but aslant from aft. All clung to life lines that the captain had ordered rigged, and the tempest threatened to tear their feet loose and leave them streaming.

Jim had never conceived of such a gale. Once in a while he caught sight of a welter of

ocean. The sky was no longer visible. The whimsy struck him that they were in the center of one great "howl." Then he saw the skipper working his way forward, carrying an axe and beckoning to some of the crew. Jim, barefooted, clinging to the lines, followed. Words were impossible. The skipper pointed to the storm jib, a rag of stout fourteen-ounce canvas, reinforced in each angle to sustain the tug of halyard, sheet, downhaul and chafe of stay. Billi took this in charge, telling off his boys by gestures to their duties.

The bows were low down now, the seas coming aboard by the bowsprit that constantly speared great masses of foam and tawny water. It seemed as if the bitts would be pulled out of the deck. Then, Jim caught the gleam of the skipper's axe severing the cable of the sea anchor, and saw him hurrying aft again to help the man left at the wheel. Up went the tiny jib, flapping furiously. The wheel spun, the schooner heeled, obeying twist of helm and the urge of the little sail, then seemed to spin

on midkeel, and they were flying before the gale that sped the seas after them like a pack of hounds that bayed and howled and frothed in their ravening.

The jib held. Billows rose threatening behind the counter, sank, lifted the *Manuwai* with resounding blows that made her shiver through all the stout timbers that the skipper had chosen so carefully. Storm ports had been closed over the trade-room windows in the stern and Jim appointed himself to go down and see if they were holding. The schooner now staggered, pitched about like a medicine ball by the seas that appeared to run at random, attacking both quarters, tearing at the flanks of the ship that defied them. Jim was pitched off his feet on to transom cushions and clawed his way aft while suspended clothes, the lamp, everything, gimbaled or hooked, swung madly. The Admiral was clinging to the bars of his tumultuous cage, beak open, seemingly screaming, though even his raucous voice could not pierce the terrific racket.

The trade-room was dark to blackness but Jim struggled to the windows of heavy glass and found their inner shutters fast screwed. Below, it felt and sounded as if the schooner was momentarily plunging to the bottom of the sea. An overtaking sea would smash down on the decks and Jim could feel the gallant vessel shudder, stiffen, seem to stand still and then go pitching, wallowing on.

If he was going to be drowned, he decided, he would be drowned in company, and he went up on deck again. Billi was with the skipper at the wheel, two drenched but stalwart figures standing with legs far apart, held by lashings to the helm, now the most exposed spot on deck. Jim managed to hitch forward and got at last under the lee of the cabin skylight where three *kanakas* huddled, their brown skins pinched and bluish, their teeth chattering more in terror than with chill.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### JIM, A LIFE SAVER

Hour after hour went by and still they were driven, with the storm unabated. And then Jim began to sense short periods where the wind faltered. Presently there were distinct lulls, though, even in these, he fancied the wind and sea far greater than he had ever before experienced. A sickly gleam showed in the west where the low sun struggled to rend the clouds. A bellow from aft managed to assert itself and they set the storm-trysail between the main and fore. That sail, too, held and the *Manuwai* went leaping on, its deck at every angle inside of a minute, lofty seas flinging cisternfuls of water over her, as the wind sheared off their crests. But the gale was plainly broken. The stirred up ocean would rage long after the wind died but the end was in sight and Jim, between

the squalls, began to wonder how far they had traveled. And how fast. Surely no ocean-liner ever made better time, or, for that matter, better weather than the *Manuwai*? Jim was proud of her, proud of her builder, proud of the captain who had selected her seasoned timbers and who sailed her, prouder yet of being a part owner. He could never again think of the schooner as a thing inanimate, she had seemed so sentient in the storm.

Yet, for a while at least, he must leave her, for they were on their way back to Lele Motu, to where his Uncle Daniel expected him to stay through the dreary rains, already ushered in in earnest by this storm. The *Manuwai* was laden with stores for all those months of the southern winter, for Lele Motu and the neighboring isles for which Lele Motu was the clearing house of trade and supply.

They were late now. Daniel Morse, never too cordial of late, would be surly and little inclined to grant a favor. And Jim longed to sail across the vast Pacific with the skipper to

New Guinea and start in trading with him in new, strange places, as Captain Burr had suggested. Now his uncle would be churlish, and Jim dreaded what the effect of the long, lonely months would be upon Morse's habits, already tending towards solitary drinking between long intervals of sleep and drowsy lounging.

But this might not be helped, and he shrugged it off. The baffled gale, furious at not being able to compass the destruction of this man-made thing, flung a last savage onslaught of wave and wind that sent the schooner slithering down a frightful valley of water and staggering up the opposite hill, only to be hit at, from port and starboard, with the stunning blows of a practised, savage fighter. Jim, looking aft, saw something vividly green appear above the companion hatch that must have been opened by Billi, for he saw the skipper alone at the wheel and Billi's head showing over the peak of the skylight.

All this in one glimpse as the green object

came forward like a ball, smashed into the halyards, hung there for the space of one piteous squawk and then was torn away by a secondary gust. It was the Admiral!

And Jim was after him, unthinking but not unreasoning, for he somehow cut the marlin lashings of a halyard coil and fastened the line about his waist, before he leaped after that pitiful scrap of green and yellow and scarlet, beating the water with outspread wings, a fleck on the shoulder of a spouting billow.

The schooner shot ahead, and Jim brought up with a jerk at the end of his line, threatening to sever him as it cut into the muscles of his stomach. But he had clutched the Admiral; he held that bunch of limp bedraggled fowl to his chest with one hand, while with the other he strove to ease the pull on the halyard. And, with the last of its strength, the parrot strove to help the hold with feeble beak and claws, gripping at Jim's wet shirt.

They lifted on a crest, and Jim saw a brown, almost naked figure dive from the taffrail and

come down towards him, guided by the line, as Jim knew by the tugs that plucked him under. Then a strong arm was about him, a cheery voice rang in his ears, the voice of Billi, at home even in those battering seas, Billi with a stouter hawser and a lifebelt that he besought Jim to slip about him.

"This not cut so much. You gimme *manu*," said Billi, hanging on to the hawser, perfectly at ease. "Bimeby one time wind stop *lele* while schooner she come about."

Even as Billi spoke Jim saw the *Manuwai* swinging to the wind, bows on to them. Some one had run forward with the other end of their hawser. Others joined him. The schooner stuck her nose close into the wind, clinging there by virtue of her two storm sails and the skipper's grip on the spokes, almost stationary as the seas swashed them down towards her and the *kanakas* hauled in the slack.

Jim hung on to the Admiral while eager hands got him aboard, Billi swarming up the rope like an ape. The schooner swung off

again, and Jim was carried below, buffeted, sore and spent, but safe and triumphant.

Captain Burr turned over the wheel and came down to the cabin, his face anxious.

"I'm all right, sir," said Jim, trying to get up. "But the Admiral's all in."

"You son of a gun," said the skipper, trying to look angry and not succeeding. "Don't you know enough not to leave the ship without leave? Mate, too! A fine example! Rank mutiny, I call it. Let's see the bird."

The Admiral lay beside Jim, apparently at his last gasp. The skipper picked him up tenderly, laid him, back up, in the horny palm of his left hand and examined him. Then he got a bottle from a rack, and, sitting down by Jim, forced open the Admiral's beak and dropped into it some whisky. The Admiral's gray tongue protruded stiffly, then it moved, wagged and the liquor went down. His soaked shoulders hitched convulsively, and his claws, drawn up stiffly, limbered out. Finally, he rolled up his eyelids, looked at them both,

closed his eyes and emitted a little cluck of satisfaction.

"Wrap him up in a dry shirt, if you can find one, and he'll be as right as a trivet," said the skipper. "He may have a headache, but that's a sight better than a belly full of salt water. Jim, lad, you shouldn't have risked it, even for the Admiral. I could get along without the Admiral, but not without you, Jim, not for keeps. And, after this, if you attempt to take leave without permission, I'll—I'll put you in irons and slam you in the brig, shiver my garboard strake, if I don't!"

A faint voice echoed his.

*"Never say die, bully boy!"*

The skipper slapped his leg.

"That ain't a bird, Jim, don't tell me. I'll bet he's the transmigrated soul of Captain Kidd, that's what he is. Long life to him! I heard a general smash below, and I sent Billie down to look-see, bein' that things was moderatin' a bit, spite of that last wallop we got. I feared for the old bird, and, sure enough, the

cage was off the hook, the door bust wide open and him scared plumb foolish, scared so hard he dodged Billi and flops and flaps up on deck where the wind caught him more like one feather than a full-grown, fed-up, painted Poll-parrot!

"Gale's busted, Jim, an' we must be halfway to Lele Motu. Goin' to be a glory of a sunset after all."

Jim, rocked in the cradle of the deep, slept sound that night and well into the next day. Billi came down and *lomi-lomi'd* (massaged) the stiffness all out of him, so that he went on deck by noon. No vestige of the gale remained. The sea ran ultramarine beneath a sky of sapphire, flecked with clouds that shone like the inside of an oyster shell. A frigate bird soared and dolphin played.

"But this is 'bout the end of fine weather," said Captain Burr. "Prob'ly won't get another storm like that in a hurry, but lots of dirty weather and rain. I'm wonderin' what the wind did to Lele Motu. Traveled in a

circle, most likely, and may have touched up the group. If so, we'll find your Uncle Dan'l in his cyclone cellar."

"Cyclone cellar? I never saw one on Lele Motu." The skipper laughed.

"Your uncle calls it that. It's just a cave in the rocks. Not much to look at. He mentioned it once to me as a likely place to hide if a bad gale caught 'em."

The next day at noon Jim compared his reckoning with the skipper's, as usual, and found their Sumner's lines corresponded and the position showed Lele Motu due to appear above the still clear horizon. But no palms lifted, and Jim began to fuss. But the skipper only grinned.

"Wait a bit," he said. "We ain't lost yet."

Two hours later he called Jim to him and handed him the binoculars, pointing out the direction. Jim looked hard and long, fussing with the focus.

"Why, what's happened?" he asked at last.  
"What's happened to Lele Motu?"

"What's liable to happen to any island in these seas at this time of year and later," said the skipper. "Your Uncle Dan'l has used his cyclone cellar, I'll bet a new suit of sails. And his copra crop's goin' to be short for a year or two. I shouldn't wonder," he chuckled, "if Dan'l Morse ain't plumb disgusted with the South Seas. He's been kind of restless ever since he got his share out of the Tia Rau pearls. Mebbe he'll let you trail along of me, after all."

Jim's face shone. The skipper had then had some foundation for his hopes. Morse had hated to give up Lele Motu, while it was a source of income, but Jim could read clearly now in the present light that his uncle had become dissatisfied of late.

It did not take long after they arrived to find out the correctness of the guess. Lele Motu had been stripped by the circling storm. Coco-palms had been snapped off short as

stubble, the bush trees were uprooted or shattered, the scrub growth a straggling tangle and the copra shed and trading shack were matchwood scattered along beach and reef. But for the cave Morse and his *kanakas* would have had a hard time of it.

"Blown clean out of business," said Daniel Morse. "I'm plumb disgusted, Burr. Got a good mind to go back to God's Country. I ain't ever rode in an automobile or an aeroplane, or seen a moving picture, even. I ain't been away from this dump of mine, even to Tahiti for fifteen years, and now 'dump' is the right word for it. If you want it, Jim, I'll make you a present of it."

The skipper winked at Jim.

"Why don't you go up to the coast, Dan'l?" he suggested. "Do you good. Replant your coco-palms, and, when you get ready to come back—for you will—there'll be a fresh crop of nuts waitin' for you. Don't you worry none about Jim. I'll take him along with me and glad to. We'll take you and your boys to Ta-

hiti, after we've seen what's happened to the other islands close by and then you can take the steamer. Jim an' me won't charge you passage neither, will we, Jim?"

"Captain?" asked Jim later, after all things were arranged. "How much of a trip is it to New Guinea?"

"Tahiti to Port Moresby? Call it thirty-five hundred miles and you come pretty close to it. Some trip, it'll be, eh Jim?"

"I'll say so. Say, skipper, I wonder what the Admiral will think of Birds of Paradise?"

"Wal, he's got one advantage, whatever he does think, he can tell 'em, soon's he learns the lingo."

THE END









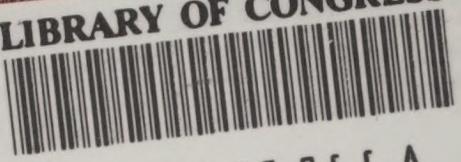






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